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**THE APPLICABILITY  
OF THE  
EFQM EXCELLENCE MODEL TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Submission for PhD  
University College London**

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January 2007**

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# **THE APPLICABILITY OF THE EFQM EXCELLENCE MODEL TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **Abstract**

This research considers the applicability of a generic quality model (the EFQM Excellence Model (the Model)) that has been used extensively in the private sector and increasingly in the public sector.

To enable me to test out the applicability of the Model I employed four research methods including a self-assessment against the Model criteria (an intrinsic part of the Model process) in an institution with which I was familiar. Having recognised the utility of the Model through both a desk research process whereby I used my knowledge of both the Model and higher education to relate the former to the latter and the process of self-assessment I decided to consider the cultural features of higher education institutions to test out what factors play a part in the possible implementation and use of the Model in the higher education sector. To do this I identified a sample of twenty higher education institutions and looked at both their printed materials working on the basis that what they say about themselves in such documented materials will provide some clues to how they function. I also visited nine of the institutions in the sample and so was able to compare and contrast that which they said in their printed materials with what seemed to be the case on the ground.

The conclusion I reached was the Model was applicable to higher education in that both I and others had used it to some effect. However, I could also identify aspects of higher education institutions which might get in the way of this being an effective tool. These were: the view of leadership; how students were perceived; the fragmented nature of higher education institutions; the focus on external quality assessment rather than internal quality enhancement and sector approaches to change which tend to be risk-averse.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due first and foremost to the wisdom and perspicacity of my supervisor, Professor Lewis Elton. Without his belief in me and my abilities I would have given up long ago. However, his interest in my work and his constructive feedback provided me with an incentive to continue. Thanks too to my long suffering husband, Ray Clark, who has had to endure many evenings and weekends without me. His patience and desire for me to succeed have been much appreciated. Lastly and by no means least, two people whose conversations about my research have provided me with insights that otherwise might have stayed hidden. They are my sister Joyce Henderson and my friend, Pat Melly.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Aim of the research, methods and conclusions**

The aim of this ethnographic research was to test out the applicability of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)<sup>1</sup> Excellence Model (the Model) to higher education, that is, to test out if the Model could be of use in higher education in its pursuit of quality.

Initially, I used two methods to test out the applicability of the Model both theoretically and practically by undertaking desk research in taking the criterion parts of the Model and looking for a fit with higher education systems, people and language and by undertaking a self-assessment using the same criteria in 'Clock' College (a higher education institution with which I was familiar) and subsequently evaluating the outcomes of using 'Clock' College as a case study by interviewing staff, creating an action plan to respond to the outcomes of the self-assessment and by identifying the hindering and helping factors for implementation.

The conclusions from these two methods that I reached were that the Model could be applied to higher education. However, I was aware too that not many of the UK's higher education institutions had adopted the Model and so I wondered what the inhibiting factors might be. To that end I decided to consider the culture of higher education, if such a thing existed. To enable me to achieve this objective I undertook two additional research methods: I took printed materials of twenty higher education institutions (HEIs) to see what those told me about the way in which they went about things, that is, what they said about the culture of the organisation; and lastly, I interviewed staff in nine of the twenty HEIs to get the inside perspective on how they perceived the culture of their institution.

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<sup>1</sup> The European Foundation for Quality Management is a not-for-profit membership organisation and is the primary source for organisations in Europe looking to excel in their market and their business. It was founded in 1989 by the CEOs of prominent European businesses

## Quality and the EFQM model

Quality is an important issue in higher education and a number of external accountability models have been used over the last decade to monitor quality. The EFQM Excellence Model has been around since the early 1990's and has been used by a number and range of organisations for quality assurance and improvement purposes. Appendix 01 shows the organisations (winners and finalists) which have used the Model by making application for the Annual Award of both the British Quality Foundation <sup>2</sup> and the European Foundation for Quality Management, some of which are public sector organisations and other private.

What I discovered through these four research methods was that the Excellence Model was and was not applicable. There is no doubt that it can be used in higher education institutions as I and others have used the criteria and the process of self-assessment associated with the Model. However, I identified too a number of issues that would work for and against the use of the Model in higher education institutions. From my research these issues suggested a degree of commonality between higher education institutions which led me to believe that there was a higher education culture, that is, that it was possible to identify the things that were seen to be important and symptomatic of higher education institutions that would contribute to the kind of organisation it was. Such a higher education culture consisted of features like its fragmented structure where small units of staff interact with one another within the unit but not others in other departments or functions; a tendency towards being risk-averse which I would argue is linked to another aspect of culture, that of heavy external control in the name of accountability which I believe works against a culture of innovation and experimentation. This control is evidenced by the weight of external quality assessments and their requirements and the burdensome nature of them. At the same time there seems to be a tendency to rely on external quality assessments for the determination of a quality culture which may emanate from a lack of leadership which was another aspect identified through this research. In addition to the above issues there was and is the significant issue of how students are perceived in higher education institutions. The concept of students as customers has been debated and in some quarters found wanting but I would argue that it is important to clarify exactly what the relationship is in the interest of mutual respect and trust.

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<sup>2</sup> The British Quality Foundation (BQF) is a national partner of the EFQM and is a not-for-profit membership organisation that promotes business excellence to private, public and voluntary organisations. The BQF is Europe's largest corporate membership organisation promoting performance improvement and excellence.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

My conclusions were that higher education institutions needed to regain the quality culture ground for themselves and that to enable them to do so required more effective leadership to create an appropriate sense of quality direction for institutions, that worked with staff in the creation of internal approaches to a quality culture notwithstanding the external requirements and which took account of staff and student views in the pursuit of continuous improvement and quality enhancement.

Given the outcomes of this research I would recommend that future research focuses on the processes of creating and determining internal quality cultures considering the most effective leadership approaches in doing so. I think that, given the outcomes of my research, it would be useful to the sector to be in a position to make specific recommendations on appropriate approaches to quality enhancement to be taken.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The structure of this thesis is that the next chapter looks in more detail at what the Model is and attempts to do and considers the context of quality within which the Model might be seen to have value and utility. Chapter three on culture provides a context within which two aspects of the research have taken place, namely, the consideration of higher education culture, if one exists and its impact on the usefulness of the Model. Chapter four looks at the research strategy and methodology employed to achieve the research objectives.

Chapters five, six, seven and eight describe the outcomes of each of the research methods used in turn and chapter nine reaches conclusions about the applicability of the Model to higher education as a result of analysis of the research outcomes. Finally, in chapter ten I make some recommendations as a result of the analysis and determination of research outcomes.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model and its appropriateness to higher education**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is intended to provide a context to my research. To that extent it includes some disparate and unconnected matters which all relate to the subject of this research. In this chapter I focus on a description and critique of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model including references to work done by other in this area. Moreover, significantly for higher education, I also explore an important aspect of the Model, that of self-assessment. I say 'significantly for higher education' because self-assessment processes in higher education are so often associated with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)<sup>3</sup> processes of quality audit and assessment. So, in this chapter I will discuss how self-assessment is seen in the context of the Model and internal review systems and how that fits in the context of quality evaluation in higher education.

In true ethnographic research style I have adopted the approach of dispersing other appropriate literature references through the thesis, as this research did not follow a sequential process of literature review, research objectives, research and writing up. Rather, research objectives were set, researched, reviewed, revised and re-set. In the course of chapter three on research methodology I share the detail of this process.

#### **2.2 Development of the Model**

In the late 1980s there were concerns in Western Europe about its competitive position within the global economy. These concerns need to be seen in the context of post-war Japanese commercial and industrial success and the American response thereto.

In response to these concerns, combined with an appreciation that they could be managed through the application of Total Quality Management processes and principles, fourteen leading European businesses took the initiative in forming the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM).

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<sup>3</sup> The Quality Assurance Agency's mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education

During 1990 a small group from the member organisations completed a review of the literature and models available and developed the European Model for Total Quality Management by taking the best from previous developments. Once this was completed the Model was reviewed by three hundred private sector organisations across Western Europe. The purpose of this review was to check out the representative nature of the Model's content and approaches and to determine the relative importance of these activities within an excellent organisation.

In 1991 the EFQM launched the European Quality Prizes and the European Quality Award based on organisational self-assessment in relation to the Model.

In 1992 the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Peter Lilley established a Quality Award Committee, chaired by Sir Denys Henderson. The terms of the committee were:

“To consider and report on the feasibility of developing a new prestige award for British businesses, building on the existing British Quality Award and, if the feasibility is confirmed, to make recommendations for the subsequent introduction and development of the award”. (Henderson, 1992)

Key to the requirements for any new award was the view that it should be in a form suitable for use as a self-assessment tool by all sectors of the British economy and for all sizes of organisation. In 1994 the British Quality Foundation launched the new UK Quality Award based on organisational self-assessment. From 1996 the Model was known as the Business Excellence Model and since its revision in 1999 the EFQM Excellence Model.

## **2.3 The Excellence Model**

The Model is a non-prescriptive framework that recognises that there are many approaches to achieving sustainable excellence. Within this non-prescriptive approach there are some 'fundamental concepts' which underpin the EFQM Model. The source for the following descriptions of those fundamental principles is the British Quality Foundation (BQF)<sup>4</sup>:

### **Results orientation**

Excellence is achieving results that delight the organisation's stakeholders

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<sup>4</sup> The British Quality Foundation's mission is to be a leader in helping organisations of all kinds to improve their performance and achieve sustainable excellence.

**Customer focus**

Excellence is creating sustainable customer value.

**Leadership and constancy of purpose**

Excellence is visionary and inspirational leadership, coupled with constancy of purpose.

**Management by processes and facts**

Excellence is managing the organisation through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems, processes and facts.

**People development and involvement**

Excellence is maximising the contribution of employees through their development and involvement.

**Continuous learning, innovation and improvement**

Excellence is challenging the status quo and effecting change by using learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities.

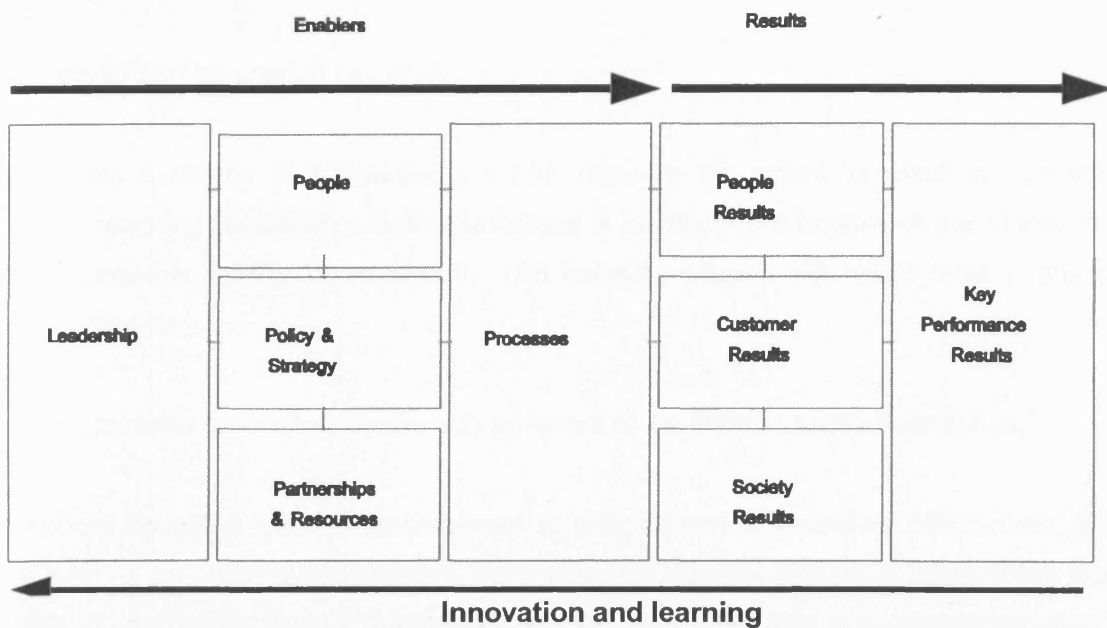
**Partnership development**

Excellence is developing and maintaining value-adding partnerships.

**Corporate social responsibility**

Excellence is exceeding the minimum regulatory framework in which the organisation operates and to strive to understand and respond to the expectations of their stakeholders in society.

These fundamental principles of the Model are seen as underpinning any approach to excellence, that is, they are the building blocks on which approaches to excellence are built. At the same time, the EFQM and the BQF present a framework suggesting a particular approach to excellence which reflects the fundamental principles. This is referred to as the EFQM Excellence Model shown in Figure 1. It is based on the premise that customer results, people (employee) results and society results are achieved through leadership driving policy and strategy, people, resources and partnerships leading ultimately to excellence in key performance results.



**Figure 1: The EFQM Excellence Model**  
**Source: The European Foundation for Quality Management**

The Model is split on an equal basis between the enabler criteria (leadership, people, policy and strategy, partnerships and resources and processes) which are concerned with *how* an organisation approaches its business in each of the areas described by the criteria, and the results criteria (people results, customer results, society results and key performance results) which are concerned with *what* an organisation has achieved and is achieving. Each criterion is sub-divided into a variable number of sub-criteria, which cover in more detail diverse aspects of the overall criterion concept.

Each of the nine criteria can be used to assess an organisation's progress towards excellence. The percentage figures, determined through analysis and research by those developing the Model, show the relative weighting for each of the criteria:

Leadership	10%
People (staff)	9%
Policy and strategy	9%
Partnerships and resources	9%
Processes	14%
People (staff) results	9%
Customer results	20%
Society results	6%

Key performance results      15%

The Model can be used in two ways:

- as a means of self-assessment to measure the extent to which an organisation is reaching excellence. Self-assessment is an important feature of the Model in working towards quality improvement. (An issue to which I will return later in this chapter); and/or
- to make application for the annual award of the British Quality Foundation.

It should be noted that self-assessment is only honest in revealing deficiencies, if it is not followed by an external assessment that makes a judgment about the worth of the work being done, in which case it pays to hide deficiencies. This distinction is fundamental when thinking about the way in which the Model is and can be used in private businesses which are not externally accountable and public institutions which are. However, what the Model would argue for is an internal exercise for internal consumption. That is for the organisation itself to use the criterion parts of the Model and the process of self-assessment to identify areas for improvement. Whether that is then used as part of the self-assessment process required as part of an external assessment would be up to the organisation/institution to decide. This issue of how self-assessment can be undertaken within a higher education institution is something to which I return in chapter nine.

In both of the above circumstances all of the criteria are expected to be covered. However, the areas to address within the criterion and sub-criterion parts are optional and an organisation may introduce its own ideas. In this way it is up to the organisation to demonstrate the extent to which, and in what ways, it achieves the criteria. In this way the Model is not prescriptive other than it assumes a knowledge of what constitutes the generalities of excellence based on extensive market research over a period of years. The purpose of this research is to test out the applicability of what is seen (by the European Foundation for Quality Management and the British Quality Foundation) as a generic model to a specific sector – that of higher education. The Model is constantly under revision and so the principles of evaluation and assessment as core tenets of this approach to excellence are themselves exemplified in the approach to continuous improvement of the Model itself.

## Scoring with the Model

At the heart of the Model lies the logic known as RADAR which consists of 4 elements:

- **Results**
- **Approach**
- **Deployment**
- **Assessment and Review**

This logic states that an organisation needs to:

- determine the **Results** it is aiming for as part of its policy and strategy making process. These results cover the performance of the organisation both financially and operationally and the perceptions of its stakeholders
- plan and develop an integrated set of sound **Approaches** to deliver the desired results both now and in the future
- **Deploy** the approaches in a systematic way to ensure full implementation
- **Assess and Review** the approaches followed based on monitoring and analysis of the results achieved and ongoing learning activities. Based on this identify, prioritise, plan and implement improvements where needed

Copy of the scoring template based on RADAR is included at appendix 02.

Within the five 'enabler' criteria (leadership, people, strategy and policy, partnerships and resources, and processes – see appendix 03 for a description of each of these terms) an organisation is asked to assess the excellence of the approaches it uses and the extent to which these approaches are deployed through the whole organisation, both vertically through all levels and horizontally to all areas and activities within the organisation. Approach and deployment are scored individually for each sub-criterion of each enabler before arriving at an overall score. When working with the four 'results' criteria of the Model (people, customers, impact on society and key performance results) organisations assess their results in terms of the actual performance trends, the comparison of targets and, wherever possible, the organisational comparisons with competitors and the "best in class".

To score or not to score is a question. It is not mandatory and is meant to be helpful in terms of providing a tangible assessment as well as providing the opportunity to benchmark oneself against other organisations either at a criterion or at an overall score level. This is likely to be an issue in academia where academic staff may be sceptical about some processes which could result in some “game playing”. (Elton, 2003). This would depend on the extent to which the methodology was explained and the process approved of.

The Model is described as a holistic approach to quality. As such the British Quality Foundation has produced a chart demonstrating how other approaches to quality assurance and improvement fit in (British Quality Foundation Links Poster). To this table I have added the outcomes of the research mentioned above by Miller and Sullivan (2003).

	ISO 9000	Investors in People	CharterMark	QAA
<b>Leadership</b>	Indirect Impact *	Secondary Impact **	Indirect Impact *	Indirect Impact *
<b>Policy &amp; Strategy</b>	Secondary Impact **	Secondary Impact **	Secondary Impact **	Indirect Impact *
<b>People</b>	Indirect Impact *	Critical Impact ***	Secondary Impact **	Indirect Impact *
<b>Partnerships &amp; Resources</b>	Secondary Impact **	Indirect Impact *	Secondary Impact **	Indirect Impact *
<b>Processes</b>	Critical Impact ***	Indirect Impact *	Indirect Impact *	Critical Impact ***
<b>Customer Results</b>	Secondary Impact **	Indirect Impact *	Critical Impact ***	Critical Impact ***
<b>People Results</b>	Indirect Impact *	Critical Impact ***	Indirect Impact *	Indirect Impact *
<b>Society Results</b>	Not addressed	Not addressed	Indirect Impact *	Indirect Impact *
<b>Performance</b>	Indirect Impact *	Secondary Impact **	Critical Impact ***	Critical Impact ***

**Table 1: Links of the Excellence Model with other quality standards**

**Source: Adapted from Miller and Sullivan , 2003 and British Quality Foundation Links Poster**

The terms in the above table signify the relationship between the elements of the Excellence Model and other quality indicators. So, a ‘critical impact assessment’ suggests a strong

correlation and conversely an 'indirect impact' suggest not much connectedness. So, the above Table suggests that the Model has a more comprehensive coverage of organisational excellence than many of the other standards being currently employed in both higher education and the public sector generally.

A British Quality Foundation (BQF) White Paper (2003) acknowledged that there were a number of reasons why people, particularly senior executives question whether the Excellence Model works but the main one is a lack of evidence. The Report states that there is no question that organisations have benefited immensely from successful implementation of the Model citing examples of those who have been excellence Award winners like Rolls-Royce, Siemens and TNT. However, the Report also acknowledges that even here evidence that is presented can be seen as anecdotal and rarely accounts for the fact that performance improvements could also be influenced by other factors such as industry and the economy.

The approach taken to this controversy was to use objective and verifiable data to examine the strengths of the relationship between business excellence and financial performance. This was done in two research projects: the first by Kevin B Hendricks of the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario and Vinod R Singhal of the DuPree College of Management at the Georgia Institute of Technology (1997); and the second by a team of researchers at the University of Leicester and led by Dr Louise Boulter (2005). The Hendricks and Singhal research was considering the relationship between total quality management and financial performance; the University of Leicester research looked at the relationship between those organisations using the Excellence Model to the point of being winners of the annual Award process and key financial results. Both reports provide in contrast to the anecdotal and perceptual evidence that has been used by many experts to pass judgment on whether Business Excellence is valuable or not, a factual, objective and statistical relationship between the use of total quality management and the Model and its impact on financial performance. However, the British Quality Foundation Report also recognises that if organisations wish to implement the Excellence Model effectively, they must have patience as it is widely accepted that 'excellence' takes a long time to implement as it requires major changes in culture and employee mindset meaning that the benefits will only be realised in the long run.

## **2.4 Development of the Model in the public sector**

A survey carried out by Price Waterhouse Cooper in August 2000 on behalf of the Cabinet Office analysed 3,500 different public sector organisations. Their findings showed that there has been a substantial increase in the use of the Model in the public sector with an estimated



44% of organisations using the Model. It was also asserted that the number will increase. Although many of these organisations have only just started using the Model 81% of users found that the Model had already been found to have been an effective tool in their organisation.

Reed (1997) in her research with a number of public sector organisations<sup>5</sup> came to the conclusion that there were no systemic obstacles to the use of the Excellence Model and its associated tool of self-assessment within UK public sector organisations. Additionally, she found that the various aspects of the public sector where it can be seen to differ from the private sector have not led to difficulties in the use of the Model and that self-assessment with her pilot organisations and, given sensitive introduction, should not lead to obstacles in its use in other UK public sector organisations. This is an issue to which I will return in the conclusions chapter (nine).

## **2.5 Development of the Model in higher education**

In 2000 The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), through its Good Management Fund, supported two projects consisting of six higher education institutions<sup>6</sup>. Both projects (Sheffield Hallam, 2003, Liverpool John Moores, 2003) conclude that the Model is applicable and beneficial to higher education. They list the benefits as:

- Intangible and unexpected change in people's interaction (Liverpool John Moores, 2003). As the project progressed they saw people thinking about how things look from another point of view;
- Giving staff at all levels a voice and bringing them closer together (Liverpool John Moores, 2003);
- Promoting the value of data and facts (Liverpool John Moores, 2003 and Sheffield Hallam, 2003);
- The connection between strategic plans and how they will be achieved (Liverpool John Moores, 2003);

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<sup>5</sup> These were the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service, the Inland Revenue, a faculty of a university, a regional health executive, a military maintenance and distribution workshop, three local authority units, a department of a city council, Cleveland Constabulary and a NHS hospital trust

<sup>6</sup> These were: 1. Bath Spa University College, De Montfort University, Liverpool John Moores University, the Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College; 2. Sheffield Hallam

- Demonstrating that the Model can help an institution continuously improve the way it manages itself, whilst at the same time satisfying the demands of external agencies like the QAA (Liverpool John Moores, 2003). This is an important conclusion and one to which I will return in chapter 9, section 9.2;
- Making cost of quality savings (Liverpool John Moores, 2003);
- It offers a holistic approach in looking at all aspects of the organisation (Sheffield Hallam, 2003);
- It provides a process of self-assessment against a non-prescriptive but detailed set of criteria (Sheffield Hallam, 2003). It offers a means by which other initiatives like Investors in People can be knitted together (Sheffield Hallam, 2003);
- It offers a way in which a common focus can provide a new way of working that could be embedded into the organisation (Sheffield Hallam, 2003);
- It offers benchmarking opportunities with others within and outside the sector (Sheffield Hallam, 2003);
- It provides a framework through which the kernel of the organisation's issues could be surfaced, investigated and improved – continuously (Sheffield Hallam, 2003)

The Report from Sheffield Hallam (ibid) on the project undertaken in relation to the Model states that it has been shown that the Excellence Model is wholly appropriate and beneficial to higher and further education contexts, leading to the development of enhanced management practices across both academic and administrative areas in that it functions as a catalyst for change by providing a framework through which improvement and changes in current practice can be analysed, prioritised and understood. The benefits which they have identified are listed earlier in this section.

The authors state too (page 6) that the emphasis on quality systems has been primarily on the assurance of quality in specific (and mainly academic) areas, rather than the holistic approach offered by the Model. Interestingly they also provide a further and higher education view of the fundamental principles described in section 2.2 of this chapter:

<b>Excellence Model definition</b>	<b>Interpretation for further and higher education</b>
<b>Results orientation</b> Excellence is achieving results that delight the organisation's stakeholders	Focusing clearly on and understanding students and other customers, their needs, expectations and values, keeping in consideration and valuing their

	contribution, and the contribution of other stakeholder groups
<b>Customer focus</b> Excellence is creating sustainable customer value.	Anticipating, balancing and meeting the current and future needs of students, staff and others, though developing and setting a balanced range of appropriate indicators or targets, tracking performance, benchmarking, and taking appropriate action based on this holistic range of information
<b>Leadership and constancy of purpose</b> Excellence is visionary and inspirational leadership, coupled with constancy of purpose.	Clearly demonstrating visionary and inspirational leadership, which is transparent and open, with a constancy and unity of purpose which is shared by everyone in the institution.
<b>Management by processes and facts</b> Excellence is managing the organisation through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems, processes and facts.	Understanding and systematically managing all activities through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems and processes, with decisions based on sound and reliably evidence information
<b>People development and involvement</b> Excellence is maximising the contribution of employees through their development and involvement.	Developing, involving and engaging staff, maximising their contribution in a positive and encouraged way, with shared values and a culture of trust, openness and empowerment
<b>Continuous learning, innovation and improvement</b> Excellence is challenging the status quo and effecting change by using learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities.	Stimulating, encouraging, managing, sharing and action on learning and experiences, making changes using innovation and creativity, and enabling continuous improvement to add value in a consistent way
<b>Partnership development</b> Excellence is developing and maintaining value-adding partnerships.	Developing meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships, both internally and externally, in order to gain added value for partners, and support the achievement of both strategic and operational objectives

<b>Corporate social responsibility</b> Excellence is exceeding the minimum regulatory framework in which the organisation operates and to strive to understand and respond to the expectations of their stakeholders in society.	Understanding, appreciating and considering positively the way in which the institution interacts with and impacts on the local and wider society, from both a practical and ethical perspective
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**Table 2: The Fundamental Concepts of Excellence**  
**Source: Sheffield Hallam, 2003**

It is not clear from the report what process the authors went through to be able to identify how these fundamental principles relate to higher education in the way in which Table 2 suggests. For example the issue of the customer of a higher education institution is a controversial one. However, there does seem to be an assumption in the analysis that students are customers. Whilst I am not saying that this is necessarily the case or not I am saying that the process of such determination would have been helpful and insightful to some of the issues which I think act as a barrier in higher education. Likewise the issue of leadership is a significant one for higher education and again it would have been interesting to have known more about the internal deliberations in reaching the conclusions which they do. However, it is also fair to say that in the report the authors do also consider the implications of the relationship of the fundamental principles to higher education

In addition to the Sheffield report Liverpool John Moores (2003) state that the Excellence Model is both applicable and beneficial to higher education institutions for the following reasons:

- It effects sustained improvement in management practices;
- If shared across the sector, the information from self-evaluations and improvements made, would have helped spread effective practice;
- Self-evaluation against the Model provides all of the information needed for Quality Assurance Agency, Higher Education Funding Council for England, Higher Education Statistics Agency and other external agencies. However, the main purpose of gathering the information is for internal purposes. Approaches to self-assessment is an issue which I cover in section 2.7 of this chapter;
- The Model is an effective tool to help plan what an institution aims to achieve and, crucially, how it will achieve its aims;

- When supported by leadership, use of the Model increases people's understanding of the institution's goals and brings people closer together;
- The cost of quality savings made through acting upon the results of self-evaluation can be significant.

Additionally, Anne Miller and Philip Sullivan (2003) following their research state that the parallels between the QAA framework and the Model are uncanny as they are mutually supportive. In their briefing paper they list the links between the criterion parts of the Model and the requirements of the QAA process. Equally, Peter Williams in a foreword to the Miller and Sullivan briefing paper states that the paper is a useful contribution to the debates within the relevant parties about outcomes-based models that support continuous improvement.

So, it would seem that others have used the Model to good effect in higher education. However, that is not to suggest that there would not be possible barriers to its implementation which I consider in the next section.

## **2.6 Potential problems with the Model in higher education**

Several commentators have identified a number of potential problems associated with the implementation of both total quality management principles on which the Excellence Model is based and the Model itself. These include:

- Confusion about who the external customers of a HE institution might be e.g. government, research councils, accreditation bodies, students and employers (Hall, 1996; Oblinger, 1995; Idrus, 1996; Taylor and Hill, 1993). There is too a question about internal customers and their definition and the way in which this concept works out in practice. This issue of customers in higher education is one to which I will return in chapter eight, section 8.8.3 and chapter nine. In HEIs the internal customers are all those who work in the institution whether academic or support staff. However, there are also concerns about the use of the word 'customer' in relation to higher education where the term customer is seen to relate to a commercial transaction whereby one person pays for a service or product provided by another or by an organisation;
- "Right first time" thinking. This could be misinterpreted within universities as being counter to experimentation, research and innovation. However, when one understands that the phrase is meant to convey a shift from inspection-centred

thinking towards prevention there may be less resistance to the idea. (Taylor and Hill, 1993);

- Feedback mechanisms. Some feedback elements are weak in many universities. In other cases it is not the feedback that is missing but the lack of resultant action. (Taylor and Hill, 1993). By this is meant feedback to the institution and how that is used. In 2003 HEFCE published a report entitled Collecting and using student feedback on quality and standards in learning and teaching in higher education in which they state that feedback from students is often collected but not necessarily used in a constructive nor systematic way;

- Use of business language (Geddes, 1993; McCulloch, 1993);

- Higher education staff can be highly individualistic people given the nature of the work that they do. This can mean that they do not easily relate to the organisation and so to any organisational context. (Newby, 1997; Owlia and Aspinall, 1997; Idrus, 1996; Matthews, 1993). This links to the issue of loyalty in HEIs with academics relating to their discipline and management and support staff to their institutions. This is an issue to which I will return in my conclusions chapter, nine;

- The perception of management fads, the Model being yet another such followed by a degree of scepticism (Birnbbaum, 2001; Temple, 2005; Liverpool John Moores, 2003; Sheffield Hallam University, 2003);

- An unwillingness to change (Liverpool John Moores, 2003; Sheffield Hallam University, 2003);

- Lack of support from leadership (Liverpool John Moores, 2003; Sheffield Hallam University, 2003);

- Style of management and leadership including staff feeling bullied into taking on new ideas and approaches (Liverpool John Moores, 2003);

- 'Academic freedom' as a reason to resist change (Sheffield Hallam University, 2003);

- Failure to carry out improvements once they have been identified. (Liverpool John Moores, 2003)

Whilst the projects at Sheffield Hallam and the Liverpool John Moores saw no reason why the Model could not be applied to higher education institutions, Temple (2005) has other ideas. Using Birnbbaum's (2001) notion of management fads and the stages that they go through before extinction, he applied these to the potential rise and fall of the Excellence Model:

**Stage 1:** Organisations face a major crisis and there is a new management technique which can respond to this crisis. It is described as a proven concept that is already in use and so can be applied to higher education without any risk.

**Stage 2:** The next stage is a narrative evolution where the 'fad's promoters circulate within the organisational structures, explaining the benefits of the new system. The benefits of this new approach are extolled in terms of higher performance at lower cost. This new approach is described further as a new comprehensive paradigm.

**Stage 3:** There is a time lag between the dissemination of the new technique and user reactions and assessment. During this stage the 'fad' is still in use but little evidence of its value is available.

**Stage 4:** This stage is described as 'narrative devolution' as disenchantment with the 'fad' sets in.

**Stage 5:** Champions of the 'fad' are required to account for its failure to deliver the promised benefits. These accounts typically include accusations of poor leadership in the organisations that tried it, poor implementation skills and the resources to see it through.

I don't think there is any doubt that the use of the Excellence Model in higher education could fit into these stages. However, there may be other reasons for the lack of success with any of the initiatives which Birnbaum describes as a 'fad'. One of the purposes behind this research was to try to identify aspects of higher education that might help or hinder the implementation of the Model.

Temple (2005) goes on in his article to list a number of criticisms of the Model. Firstly, he says that it is indicative of a planned approach to organisational change rather than an emergent one. This is true but what he also seems to suggest is that 'planned' equals top-down approach. An important aspect of the Model is the way in which it involves staff in the processes of decision-making and innovation. Another important aspect of the Model is the way in which organisations in pursuit of excellence are expected to consult with and communicate to staff. In this way they work towards an agreed end point. I have visited organisations seeking the British Quality Foundation's Annual Award and one of the features of those organisations which struck me was the respect that both leaders had for staff and vice versa. I realise that the cynic will say that the people we spoke to were hand-picked and so were likely to be positive. However, even if only a few were sincere, then surely that is a culture worth developing. Additionally,

Temple (2005) argues that imposed change which does not seem to members of the organisation to relate to their everyday concerns, has very little chance of success. This reminded me of a quote from Lundquist (1996):

“No leader succeeded in telling largely autonomous professionals how to educate; no leaders succeeded in making directions stick if those professionals were not in agreement with the leader’s instructions”.

It would therefore be a very foolhardy and unwise leader who attempted such an approach in higher education. Leadership is an important aspect of higher education culture given the collegial aspect of at least traditional universities. This is an issue which I will address in more detail in chapters eight and nine.

Another criticism is that the Model does not engage adequately with the realities of management in a general sense. Temple (ibid) is concerned here with the possible notion embedded in the Model that a conflict-free way exists of seeing organisational priorities and allocating resources. I’m not sure where he gets this idea from. One of the Model criterion parts is Policy and Strategy and an aspect of that criterion is that the development of policy and strategy is based on the present and future needs and expectations of stakeholders, suggesting that there are going to be different priorities, and perspectives and that a way to synergise these is needed in the interests of the organisation moving roughly in the same direction. Kotter (1990) said that a central feature of modern organisations is interdependence and that unless people move together in roughly the same direction, they will fall over. It is not unreasonable therefore to want an organisation to be clear about where it is going.

Temple (2005) is correct in his assertion that what is being said here is that the EFQM process is one demanding constant reflection on a mass of contradictory data, judgements, risk-taking, action and evaluation. However, his point about there being no need within such a complex process to tell leaders to motivate their staff, misses the point. The Model expresses clearly and explicitly the criteria by which an organisation's journey towards excellence would be achieved. This is akin to a lecturer providing his/her students with some indication of the assessment criteria by which their work will be assessed in the interests of clarity.

How leadership is viewed in higher education institutions is important in the context of both the Model and the culture of higher education (if such a thing exists) which is the subject at least in part of this thesis and a theme and issue to which I will return in more detail in chapters eight and nine. However, it is sufficient to note here that Temple (2005) in his paper appears not so



much to criticise leadership in higher education per se but rather the way in which the Model treats the concept of leadership. He seems to suggest that the Model is deficient because it attempts to make explicit the expectations of leadership. Whilst it may be a difficult concept in the context of higher education I would argue that it is at least important if not essential to attempt to unpack its meaning and significance. Moreover, another way of thinking about leadership, particularly in collegial higher education environments, is to think about the concept at a unit or departmental level. This is an issue to which I will return in chapters eight and nine.

A final criticism which Temple (ibid) makes is that the Model does not fit the specific contours of higher education. In particular he mentions the contractor-client relationship to which I refer later in this section. However, there may be other contours specific to higher education which arise from this research and to which I give more attention in chapters eight and nine.

Interestingly, as I have been engaged in this research I have spoken with a number of friends and family members who have asked me what I was doing. In a couple of instances I met with two people whose organisations had also used the Excellence Model; what they both said was that it did not fit the contours of their industry! One worked in civil engineering and the other for the Post Office in a marketing role and so I was left with the impression that a generic model is exactly that and needs to be tweaked to fit the particular contours of the sector to which it is being applied.

Temple (ibid) does have however, some specific concerns about the Model in relation to higher education. Firstly, he argues that it assumes a contractor-client relationship between the university and its students. In fact, the Model assumes that there are customers but does not say who they are, merely that there needs to be people who are in receipt of the services (whatever they might be). One of the British Quality Award winners in 1999 was a primary school which identified its customers as the parents. There is no assumption in the Model about who the customers will be. Also, Temple (2005) makes the point that the student is involved in a joint endeavour with staff in the process of learning and transformation. This does not negate the notion of a client or customer relationship and in fact I think this focus on students and student learning is a positive one in terms of the way in which staff would think about what is in the students' interests and what constitutes effective learning and teaching.

In conclusion I would argue that Temple's paper is basically logical on the assumption that EFQM is a management fad, but he accepts that it is too early to make such a judgment. Furthermore, it is by no means impossible that it may be seen as a fad in some institutions but not in others. In particular, he does not allow for that possibility, by perhaps hypothesising what

features in a particular institution (and they are very different from each other) would turn the Model into a fad. He does not seem to appreciate the considerable differences between institutions that are managed institutionally top down and those where much management is delegated to the faculties, let alone those that are managed collegially. Finally, he does not distinguish between institutions in the private sector, where self-assessment is for real and the public one where inevitably the external assessment that follows the self-assessment makes the latter of doubtful value. This issue of self-assessment and its efficacy in higher education is one which I discuss in section 2.6 of this chapter.

## **2.7 Self-assessment and learning**

Within the context of the Model and as will be seen from the Van der Wiele et al research referred to later in this section the purpose of undertaking a self-assessment review of an organisation is to learn where there is room for improvement. Improvement doesn't happen by chance (Johnston, 2006). However, it should also be noted, in the context of the public sector and higher education in particular, that the difference between self-assessment, leading directly to improvement and self-assessment, leading to being assessed by others, e.g. QAA, and improvement following the latter, is crucial. What can happen in the latter case is activity taking place in terms of compliance rather than as a result of a genuine self-assessment (Yorke, 1996).

The emergence of the idea of the 'learning organisation' is wrapped up with notions such as 'the learning society'. Perhaps the defining contribution here was made by Schon (1973) who provided a theoretical framework linking the experience of living in a situation of increasing change with the need for learning:

"The loss of the stable state means that our society and all of its institutions are in continuous processes of transformation. We cannot expect new stable states that will endure for our own lifetimes. We must learn to understand, guide, influence and manage these transformations. We must make the capacity for undertaking them integral to ourselves and to our institutions. We must, in other words, become adept at learning. We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are 'learning systems', that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation". (Schon, 1973).

So, it could be argued that change is inevitable and that the best that we as individuals and as organisations can do is to find the constructive ways of responding to it. Peters (1989) says that only constant is change indicating that change is ubiquitous and all encompassing.

As stated earlier the purpose of self-assessment is to identify strengths and areas for enhancement in the interest of quality improvement. It is an approach to learning and development which is not new. It is at least as old as the oracle at Delphi: "Know thyself"! In the 1970s Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1978) stated that learning involved the detection and correction of error. Where something goes wrong, they suggested, a starting point for many people is to look for another strategy that will address and work within the governing variables. According to Argyris and Schon (1974), this is single-loop learning. An alternative response is to question governing variables themselves, to subject them to critical scrutiny. This they describe as double-loop learning. So, for them, the purpose of self-assessment was to facilitate learning in the interests of improvement, transformation and enhancement which could be described as the difference between doing things better and doing better things. External assessment is much more likely to lead to doing things better than to doing better things. (Elton, 2000).

Self-assessment processes are employed in a range of areas of activity from personal development planning, through internal review processes to quality assessment and audit in higher education. A key component of quality assessment, quality audit and enhancement-led institutional reviews in higher education is that the institution being reviewed should, in the first instance, produce a self-assessment of itself and/or its provision. The received view of the purpose behind these self-assessment processes is: firstly, to give an account of the education being delivered – of how resources have been deployed – and, secondly, to provide information to the department and/or institution to enable it to enhance the quality of the education it is providing (de Vries, 1997). Although one of the stated purposes is to enable the department or institution to self-evaluate in the interests of making improvements and enhancing provision it is fair to say that such approaches have largely been seen in the context of external accountability rather than for internal purposes. Such approaches can therefore result in self-assessment being done for compliance sake (ibid).

Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that the quality of education is enhanced following an unsatisfactory visit (Glasner, 1997), what is not in evidence in this review is the extent to which the improvements are ongoing once the external accountability requirements are removed. Also, there have to be questions about the way in which staff play the 'quality game' through these processes emanating from a degree of scepticism and mistrust (Baty, 2001). This is an issue to which I will return in my conclusions chapter (nine) as it is a crucial aspect to the possible

implementation of the Excellence Model. If departments only self assess when faced with an audit trail or an external imperative, then how can real and meaningful self-assessment be genuinely institutionalised? Another question to be answered in the process of self-assessment is the extent to which those undertaking the exercise are sufficiently well trained to undertake the task. This is an issue on which I will say more when I describe the process of self-assessment at 'Clock' College in chapter six.

Self-assessment is an integral part of the use of the Model in reflecting and adding value and both creates a climate and provides the means for continuous improvement. (CIHE, 2001, EFQM 1999, Zink and Schmidt, 1998, Sheffield Hallam, 2003, Liverpool John Moores, 2003).

A number of different approaches to conducting self-assessment, in relation to the Model, are used in the UK and throughout Europe. The choice of methodology remains with the organisation remembering that the paramount objective of self-assessment is continuous improvement and the most critical phase is action planning and implementation.

Throughout 1994 universities from six European countries undertook a pan-European study on self-assessment based on two questionnaire surveys (Van der Wiele et al, 1996). The researchers contacted all members of the EFQM, the participants of the First European Conference on Quality Management Self-Assessment in Milan, 1994 and those organisations known by the research team to be using self-assessment methods in the six respective countries. The main business sectors of the respondent companies were largely in the private sector but did include some in the public sector. The research determined the extent of knowledge and awareness of self-assessment methods, investigated the types of self-assessment taking place in organisations and identified the reasons for success or failure of self-assessment methods. Some of the results are shown in Table 3.

RESPONSE	RESULT (%)
Self-assessment identifies opportunities for improvement	76
Self-assessment directs the improvement process	75
Self-assessment motivates the improvement process	68
Self-assessment is used to manage the business	62

**Table 3: Outcomes of self-assessment**  
**Source: Van der Wiele, Williams et al, 1996**

The key learning points for the organisation using self-assessment were found to be the need to:

- ensure that senior management review the implementation of improvements
- involve the chief executive officer
- train those carrying out self-assessment
- begin the self-assessment with the senior management
- agree the use that will be made of the results at the beginning of the exercise

An aspect of self-assessment is the purpose for which it is done. This above list presupposes an internal perspective on self-assessment – that is, it is being done because the organisation wants to learn about its workings and to seek improvement and not as a result of an external stimulus. This could imply that external assessment should verify that a process of self-assessment with its identification of strengths and areas for improvement and a resultant action plan took place. I believe that this is the view of the Dutch equivalent to QAA (Vroeijenstijn, 1995).

However, it is interesting to consider the ways in which self-assessment processes tend to be employed in higher education, which are more often as a result of an external requirement. As can be seen from my research, higher education institutions tend to treat quality as something imposed on them, not an essential matter. The interesting point to note about the research outlined above is that the key learning points are no different to the approaches taken by the funding councils and the QAA in their exercise of implementing their approaches to quality assessment, audit and enhancement. The difference, of course, was the motivation in that the approach to self-assessment was being imposed from outside the organisation and as such is likely to devalue the process of self-assessment when it is used by an authority to make a judgment about quality (de Vries, 1997, van der Wiele, 1996, Biggs, 2001, Harvey 2002).

There are different means of undertaking a self-assessment within the Model. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages and the choice of approach rests with the organisation remembering that the objective is to seek evidence in relation to continuous improvement:

## **Award simulation**

This approach requires the organisation to fully document its activities in a report as if it were applying for the annual award of the British Quality Foundation. This report then provides evidence in relation to each of the criterion part of the Model (see appendix 03). It is subsequently reviewed by a trained assessor who looks for the strengths and areas for improvement as they would if working through the award process itself. The report and the evidence will also be scored (if that is required) so that benchmarking can take place and the organisation has some idea of how it fits into the assessment of other organisations. The main advantage of this approach is that it is seen as the most comprehensive and accurate approach to self-assessment. However, the main disadvantage is that it is also very time-consuming and resource intensive.

## **Proforma**

In their approach to self-assessment a Proforma page is created from each of the sub criterion (see appendix 03) parts of the Model so that strengths, areas for improvement and evidence can be recorded for subsequent action planning. The main advantage of this approach is its quickness and ease of use. The main disadvantage is that it is not a particularly comprehensive approach to gathering data.

## **Matrix**

A matrix is created based on the Model and usually consists of a series of statements against the criteria of the Model on a zero to ten scale which can be used simply and easily by a range of people in the organisation. The main advantage is that the matrix is easy to use. However, the main disadvantage is that it does not provide much evidence in response to the criterion parts and provide much evidence to work on.

## **Workshop**

With this option an organisation team is responsible for gathering data and evidence which is presented at a workshop. This data then provides the starting point for the team to reach consensus on the strengths, areas for improvement and to score the organisation. The main advantage is this approach is its comprehensiveness in the way in which both all the criteria are covered but also the way in which a range of

people within the organisation are involved in the process. The main disadvantage is the time that it takes.

### **Questionnaire**

A standard questionnaire approach to self-assessment does not require much resource and can be used with a number of people. The British Quality Foundation has developed a product called ASSESS which is a software-based product, the results of which are collated by the British Quality Foundation to provide benchmarking data. The main advantage of this approach is that it is fairly thorough and has the added benefit that it can be completed quite quickly. On the down side it is not as comprehensive as some of the other methods.

The general opinion on the self-assessment process within the Model is that it provides a useful tool for measuring organisational performance and identifying areas of improvement. In doing so, it facilitates benchmarking internally and externally, provides a common language between those companies employing self-assessment and prepares an organisation for future competition. Managers need a structured and regular methodology to follow self-assessment and cannot just choose to do it on a whim to fill a void or keep directors satisfied (Van der Wiele, Williams et al, 1996). The EFQM Excellence Model, for example was advocated in the Modernising Government White Paper as a practical tool to assist the continuous improvement of public services. It is being widely adopted in central and local government, the NHS, police forces, various agencies (including HEFCE) and schools as well as in a range of private sector organisations. I will return to the difference between the Model being used for internal quality improvement and external accountability purposes in chapters eight and nine.

## **2.8 A brief history of approaches to quality and self-assessment in higher education**

There has been a shift in thinking over the decades about both internal and external quality assessment in HE. Prior to the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act the 'old' universities were subject to little or no external quality regulation other than through the involvement of external examiners. During this phase the old universities, through the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), established in 1991 an Academic Audit Unit (AAU) to visit institutions and report on their systems of quality control. This was at the very end of the old regime and designed to prevent external interference, rather than to promote quality. By

contrast the then polytechnics had been subject to external quality regulation through the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate at different points in time.

1992 to 1993 saw at its beginning a binary world of higher education and by the end of the phase a unified sector emerged subsequent to the passage of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. This Act also saw the demise of the CNAA and the establishment of new funding councils. New arrangements for assessing and assuring quality were also introduced. After the Act the work of the AAU was taken over by the newly formed and institutionally "owned" Higher Education Quality Council. This Council had responsibility for quality audit in considering the systems and structures that underpin quality. The new funding councils were required by the Act to make appropriate arrangements for the assessment of the quality of teaching.

1994 was a transitional year. Institutions began to adapt themselves to the post-binary, less well funded, mass higher education system and to entertain doubts about the quality of provision. The definition of quality as "fitness for purpose" became almost universally used. It probably started with Ball (1985) and Elton's response in 1986. 1994 was also a transitional year for teaching assessment. The Barnett Report (University of London, 1994) recommended that visits be extended to cover all institutions and that they focus on "testing" the department's self-evaluation. By the end of the year a methodology based on visiting all institutions and grading of six core areas of teaching on 1-4 scale had emerged. A '1' score in any area would be sufficient to result in withdrawal of funding.

The purposes of the quality assessment approach were described as:

- To secure value from public investment
- To encourage improvements in the quality of education through the publication of assessment reports and subject overview reports and through the sharing of best practice
- To provide, through the publication of reports, effective and accessible public information on the quality of education for which the HEFCE provides funding (HEFCE, 1994)

The methodology to be employed was that of self-assessment by the institution followed by an institutional visit. The areas to be included in the institutional self-assessment were:



- Curriculum design, content and organisation
- Teaching, learning and assessment
- Student progression and achievement
- Student support and guidance
- Learning resources
- Quality assurance and enhancement

The Funding Councils' expectations of the self-assessment process was that it should be an assessment by the subject provider of the quality of the student learning experience and student achievement measured against the aims and objectives that the subject provider sets for the education of its students in that subject. The self-assessment was meant to discuss both strengths and weaknesses in the provision which was meant to help maximise the developmental benefits of assessment.

The purpose of the assessment visit was to gather, consider and to verify the evidence of quality of education in the subject, in the light of the provider's aims and objectives in that subject. This assessment would be informed by the evidence in the self-assessment and its analysis. All this has been gradually whittled down through pressure from universities, without any convincing evidence that their quality has improved in things that matter rather than in satisfying bureaucracy (Fry, 1995, Maassen, 1997, Hurrell and Greatrix, 2001, Baty, 2002, Harvey and Newton, 2004, Harvey, 2005,). This is a matter to which I will return in my conclusions chapter nine.

Following the Joint Planning Group (JPG) Report (1996) the Quality Assurance Agency was set up. At the time a number of commentators were recommending alternative quality assurance and improvement systems and structures. The objective of this alternative approach was to achieve institutional self-assessment with external audit (Roffe, 1998; Yorke, 1997; Jackson, 1997). Jackson (ibid) argued for self-regulating institutions within an external quality audit framework that would encourage institutions to become more self-critical and analytical. He argued that the current arrangements, which emphasised public accountability through publication of the results of external quality reviews, were seen by many academics to penalise openness and honesty and reward secrecy and the camouflage of problems. His vision was that a regulatory framework which focused on development which would not penalise institutions for being self-critical and would fulfil the notion of accountability by encouraging institutions to self critically evaluate the effectiveness of their regulatory mechanisms and communicate deficiencies and development needs to an external agency in the knowledge and

confidence that this will be recognised as a sign of maturity rather than an admission of weakness. It is interesting to note that this is the approach, which is now perceived to be adopted by the QAA in Scotland and to a lesser extent in England and Wales. However, there may be a difference between the rhetoric and the reality. It could also be argued that while this position is highly desirable, it is likely to be exceptionally difficult to achieve, particularly given the historical perspective of quality assessment and audit.

Outcomes of both the audit and assessment routes to quality assurance have resulted in antagonism to and suspicion of external review. There was some evidence of quality improvement as a result of external review (Glasner, 1997). In 2001 a new approach to the external review of academic quality and standards in England was published. Williams (2004), the Director of the QAA, says that audits and assessments over the past decade have confirmed that the story that emerged from the work of the 5,700 peer reviewers was one of generally high quality in all subjects and that the number of subject reviews leading to a judgment of “unsatisfactory” or “not approved” was vanishing small. However, others working in higher education had and have a different view (Elton, 2003). The sector as a whole was not comfortable with the level of scrutiny to which it was subjected. (Baty, 2001; Baty, 2002; Scannell and Schlesinger, 2003).

As a result of the QAA's assessment of the standards in higher education the new approach for external scrutiny will focus on checking that institutions are running their academic affairs in a way that can command public confidence. Within this position there is the view that responsibility for quality and standards should be with those providing the programmes and awards. However, given the history of quality assessment and audit there have to be some questions about the extent to which the sector is actually accepting this responsibility rather than shirking it? Or perhaps faking it! This is a matter to which I will return in my conclusions chapter nine.

There is no doubt that the focus on quality matters on the part of the QAA and the Funding Councils have concentrated attention on internal quality systems too. I asked those I interviewed (see chapter eight) if they thought their approaches to their quality systems would have existed without external scrutiny. By and large they thought not. There was, however, a difference of view between the 'old' and 'new' universities with the 'new' having more of a historical culture of internal quality monitoring. Harvey (1997) said that external quality monitoring acts as a catalyst of one sort or another and that the internal processes that grow up in parallel to external monitoring, or as a direct consequence of external monitoring have the most impact. However, for me there is still

an issue about the need to recognise that self-assessment as a process of improvement for its own sake is of value – there is the need for this kind of culture to be inculcated rather than one that merely jumps through the QAA hoops as and when required.

So, what hope is there that systems, approaches and procedures will be implemented in the interests of quality enhancement rather than externally imposed systems seen to be of benefit to the funder rather than the institution. Yorke (1996) states that the effect of external quality scrutiny has been on the rectification of deficiencies rather than providing a stimulus towards reviewing the nature of provision. He goes on to develop an analogy with humankind: 'if one were to polarise quality assessment and enhancement in terms of humankind, the former would be seen as being based on a doctrine of original sin and the latter on one of inherent good'. Elton (2001) takes up this point and proposes a system of self-assessment in which an institution declares and evaluates its own practices, followed by an internal and then an external audit. This is what Vroeijenstijn (1995) describes as the Dutch system. All of these processes should be carried out collegially with internal processes greatly strengthened though the appointment of external consultants and external auditors acting as consultants, not as judges. In so saying he is describing the way in which the Model can be used within an organisation to continuously improve. He goes on to say that quality assurance should emerge from quality enhancement, that assurance in itself is a negative concept which can at best ensure that things are done well, but it can never ensure that things are done better or better things done.

There are questions about who decides on the approach to be taken but that is likely to rest with either the initiator of the idea to undertake such an approach to quality or with those to whom that responsibility has been delegated.

The frequency with which external quality assurance arrangements have been changed, often quite significantly, during the last ten years must give rise to questions about their overall purpose and effectiveness. Merely tinkering with the details of the new proposals is unlikely to answer these questions, superficially attractive though the proposals might be in seeming to reduce significantly the volume of external scrutiny. A more radical review may be necessary. So, the question is how are HEIs going to assure both themselves and the QAA of quality assurance and enhancement? A main feature of the Excellence Model is the way in which it can be used as an internal tool to facilitate continuous improvement. In recent years HEIs have been subject to a range of external quality assessment and audits which have resulted in a feeling on the part of staff in

HEIs that they are not to be trusted. The Model could allow institutions to demonstrate that they are working towards quality assurance and enhancement. However, it would need to be taken up for its own sake rather than be seen as yet another government tool. The issue of trust and accountability is one to which I will return in chapter eight, section 8.1.1.5 and chapter nine.

An important point to note given this perspective on quality and self-assessment in higher education is that self-assessment as an approach and concept is connected to quality assessment and audit and so has been dissociated from the internally derived approach described in section 2.7. It would not be true to say that self-assessment and review processes do not go on in higher education institutions but rather there is an external imperative, an important component of which is a self-assessment report and that as such the words and the process would need to be explained and adopted outside of the likely current understanding. It is interesting that there is no corresponding quality assurance process for research, where universities are trusted to want to do a good job and those who are assessed as doing the best job are rewarded through the RAE.

## **2.9 Chapter conclusions**

In this chapter I have described the development of the Excellence Model in general terms as well as its reference to both the public sector and higher education. Central to the use of the Model is a process of self-assessment, which, as a term and given its significance within QAA assessment and audit processes, has a pejorative ring to it. However, I described too the way in which self-assessment processes can be used for internal quality enhancement processes. Problems in the use of the Model are described in section 2.6. It will be seen from the research methods employed that some of these came out too of the interviews which I considered with nine HEIs.

It can also be seen from this chapter that considerations of quality in HEIs is a significant issue and so the rest of this thesis is about pulling these threads together to test out the applicability of the Excellence Model as a generic quality model to higher education.

## **Chapter 3**

### **A review of concepts of culture**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

I have decided to include a separate chapter on culture rather than include it in chapter two which is a chapter contextual to this research. I have decided to do this as the culture of higher education institutions became such a large aspect of this research. After I had conducted some desk research applying the Model criteria to higher education and after the self-assessment in 'Clock' it seemed to me that there were cultural elements at play that would suggest whether the Model could be applied to higher education or not. And so the next two research methods adopted – that of a consideration of printed materials and interviews with staff in HEIs – focussed on trying to get both a 'worm's' and 'bird's' eye view of what that culture might be. For these reasons I have kept this chapter separate.

I intend in this chapter to consider the views of organisational culture, what it is or is not and how it can be assessed and then describe my own views on the subject which have influenced the approach which I have taken in this research.

#### **3.2 Concepts**

Organisational culture is the term used to comprise a set of 'soft' behavioural variables which underlie internal organisation (Denison, 1990). However, agreement on more precise definitions of culture do not exist. The problems of definition are reflected by the fact that Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified one hundred and sixty four definitions of culture and nearly four decades later Ott (1989) lists seventy-three words or phrases used to define organisational culture from fifty-eight different published sources. Despite this lack of agreement, Lundberg (1990) reports that a careful distillation of themes provides the following consensual understandings of organisational culture as:

- A shared common frame of reference i.e., it is largely taken for granted and is shared by some significant portion of members;
- Acquired and governing, i.e., it is socially learned and transmitted by members and provides them with rules for organisational behaviour;
- A common psychology i.e., it denotes the organisation's uniqueness and contributes to its identity;

- Enduring over time i.e., it can be found in any fairly stable social unit of any size as long as it has a reasonable history;
- Symbolic; i.e., it is manifested in observables such as language, behaviour and things which are attributed meanings;
- Being at its core typically invisible and determinant i.e., ultimately consists of a configuration of deeply buried values and assumptions;
- Modifiable but not easily so.

Schein (1990) and Lundberg (1990) view culture as a layered phenomenon, composed of interrelated levels of meanings – from those relatively observable to those mostly invisible. Schein (1985) specifies three levels; artefacts and creations (technology, art, visible and audible behaviour patterns), values, and basic assumptions. A typology of organisational culture, proposed by Ott (1989) and based primarily on the work of Schein (1985) is described below. To Level 1 of Schein's typology – artefacts – Ott (1989) has added a level 1B – patterns of behaviour, based on a distinction first proposed by Martin and Siehl (1983) who used the narrower label of management practices.

#### Level 1A – artefacts -according to Schein (1990)

When one enters an organisation one observes and feels its artefacts. This category includes everything from the physical layout, the dress code, the manner in which people address each other, the smell and feel of the place, its emotional intensity and other phenomena, to more permanent archival manifestations such as company records, products, statements of philosophy and annual reports. The other phenomena referred to include organisational structure and technology, language (jargon, sayings and slogans) stories (myths sagas and legends) ceremonies and celebrations, ritualistic activities and patterned conduct (norms and management practices).

According to Schein (1990) the problem with artefacts is that they are palpable but hard to decipher accurately. We can see, for example, that one company centralises all its decision making at the top but this does not tell us anything about why this is so or what meaning it has to the members. As Sathe (1985) has noted, artefacts are relatively 'easy to see but hard to interpret without an understanding of the other (two) levels'.

## Level 1B – patterns of behaviour

Patterns of behaviour are things that members of an organisational culture continue to do (or that causes members to do things) often without thinking. Included at this level are management practices such as human resource practices, innovation practices and relation to client (Calori and Sarnin, 1991), norms, rites and rituals. Rites and rituals are described by Ott as being the 'mundane, systematic, stylised and programmed routines of daily organisational life' and could, for example, include all outgoing letters being routed via the organisation's director.

## Level 2 – patterns and beliefs

In Schein's (1985) typology, values and beliefs give the reasons why people behave as they do. They provide justification for behaviour (Sathe, 1985). Ott (1989) suggests that 'beliefs and values are so important to organisational culture that many organisational culture authors define them – and the broader system of ethical or moral codes in which they are embedded – as the organisational culture'. For example, Deal and Kennedy (1982) talk of shared values that govern everyday life in the workplace and Calori and Sarnin (1991) describe the culture of an organisation as 'a set of values'.

Beliefs are consciously held; they are cognitive views about truth and reality, such as a belief that concentrating on serving the customer will make an organisation more competitive, or a belief that competition between employees usually does more harm than good (Hofstede et al, 1990). Ott (1989) reports that beliefs provide cognitive justifications for organisational action patterns while values provide the emotional energy or motivation to enact them. Calori and Sarnin (1991) list sixty work-related values, which include such things as the value that the customer should always come first, the value of respecting rules or the value of honesty.

Composite systems of values and beliefs make up moral and ethical codes. Organisational ideologies are also included at this level of culture. Ethical and moral codes refer to systems of right and wrong, and ideologies refer to the major beliefs and values expressed by top management that provide organisational members with a frame of reference for action (Hartley, 1983). According to Pettigrew (1979) ideology is an important component of culture since it has an action impelling quality i.e. it has the ability to link attitude with important components of culture since it has the ability to link attitude with action.

### Level 3 – basic underlying assumptions

'Basic Assumptions' is a relatively new concept that has only recently received attention in the literature. However, some organisation theorists, notably Schein (1985), are now defining organisational culture as its basic assumptions. Schein (1985) defines basic assumptions as fundamental beliefs, values and perceptions that 'have become so taken for granted that one finds little variation within a cultural unit'. These assumptions may begin as values but over time they gradually come to be taken for granted and move out of members' consciousness into their preconsciousness. Therefore, basic assumptions can be thought of as a comprehensive, potent, but out-of-consciousness system of beliefs, perceptions and values.

Culture is a soft aspect of an organisation, the details of which are carried in people's minds, and even though they may not be aware of doing so, they use this information to interpret what surrounds them, for example to judge whether something is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. If the majority of these meanings are shared by all or most of the people in an organisation, it has a definitive culture. Nevertheless, the details from which the meanings are constructed can exist at different levels of visibility – some are directly observable while others are nearly invisible.

At the other extreme Martin (1992) identifies what she calls a fragmentationist perspective, in which organisations are so full of ambiguities and inconsistencies that they cannot be said to have a culture. Rather, people respond in an ad hoc way to constantly changing conditions. Martin (ibid) also identifies a middle ground position, which she calls the differentiationist perspective, which acknowledges the possibility that within an organisation's overall culture there can be variations in which different groups of people have slightly different cultures.

An interesting insight on these polarised positions is given by Harris and Ogbonna (1998) who show that they commonly exist side by side in different parts of the same organisation. Perhaps because they like to view the organisation as one big family, top managers tend to adopt an integrationist view, whereas middle managers, who are more sharply focused on their own functional roles or specialisms, have differentiationist perspectives. At the very bottom of an organisation, where people often have to keep their heads down and focus on their immediate tasks, with no sight of a bigger picture, shop-floor workers are prone to take a fragmentationist view.



With respect to research approaches to culture Smircich (1983) distinguishes five different streams of research that link the concepts of culture and organisation. Although these all have their own underlying assumptions, she also points out that they can be divided into two strongly contrasting schools of thought. The first is called here the *key variable or application school*. This makes use of open systems ideas and views and is something that an organisation has to acquire the right properties thereof to remain in balance with its environment. Viewed this way, culture is a property in the same way that structure and size are properties that enable an organisation to cope with environmental demands; that is, culture is something an organisation 'has'. A key assumption of this school is that culture is a crucial ingredient of organisational success. It allows the firm to marshal the commitment of its members to achieving the firm's goals and so it is similar to Martin's (1992) integrationist perspective. Since this offers the prospect of using culture to influence organisational performance, it is the perspective that has the strongest appeal to managers or, as Wilson and Rosenfeld (1990) put it, 'for once it would seem that organisational behaviour has come up with a topic with few ifs and buts, which is readily comprehended and can be applied immediately'. Thus, it has given rise to a considerable volume of work in the area, the vast majority of which has attempted to identify cultures that promote success (i.e. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982) and advocate how to obtain these cultural characteristics (Kanter 1995). In non-academic circles this is by far the most influential school and it has spawned a growth industry for organisational development practitioners who have long sought to manipulate cultures to serve the interests of management.

The second approach is what Smircich calls the culture as a *root metaphor school*. This views culture as something which an organisation 'is', and is less concerned with trying to link culture with organisational performance because its main focus is on trying to understand how cultures are experienced by organisational members and how this affects the way they behave. Research in this area is more strongly focused on the study of culture for its own sake, an activity that has great appeal to academics but which finds far less favour with managers, sometimes because the accounts are difficult to understand and are far too deep and complex for their tastes. Therefore, more of the better-known perspectives are firmly located in the application school.

### **3.3 Higher education culture**

Likewise, with respect to higher education the question is whether a university or college can be said to have a culture and in what ways the members of different disciplines considered

themselves to be part of the same institutional 'community' ('other than having the same employer'), or whether they are more likely to have an affinity with others in the same discipline in other institutions (Barnett, 1990). A decade later Barnett was more forthright:

"Large multifaculty universities – and even relatively small institutions – are a conglomerate of knowledge factions, interests and activities. We cannot assume that the manifold activities of the 'multiversity' have anything in common. It follows that the notion that there could be a single binding characteristic that all constituent parts of the university share, that there could be an essence, has to be suspect". (Barnett, 2000)

Research into the culture of higher education has been frequently directed to disciplinary and substructural issues. (Henkel, 2000; Deem, 2001; Dill, 1982; Tierney, 1988). It has also frequently pointed to something other than the operation of subject-related structures or the functioning of the institution. Where the focus of analysis is on the institution, perhaps with a particular interest in the discipline and its structural proxies, the interpretations generally have a theoretical and observational basis, but only rarely encompass the perceptions of the actors themselves. They are more often views from a high window. Becher's (1989) study of 'tribes and territories' was one exception, but with the specific intention of exploring the discipline and its sub-branches through the eyes of members of elite departments, where the commitments to research and to a national and international disciplinary community were most unambiguously located.

The literature that explored the universities and colleges as cultural entities did offer typologies based on ethnographic or structural methodologies (Chaffee and Tierney, 1988; McNay, 1995). From the mid 1980s, research and discussion internationally focused extensively on the impacts of managerial and market-driven policies on higher education, and at the same time on power of the subject or department or other basic unit as its proxy, in shaping the way academic staff define and locate themselves in a 'culture' or 'subculture' (Clark, 1984; Becher, 1989; Evans, 1988, 1990). It was often assumed that the analysis and its outcomes relating to industry and commerce were transferable elsewhere, including to education, especially universities which were seen as becoming increasingly 'managerial', 'centralised', 'market oriented' and 'commercialised'.

Silver (2003) concluded that, in recent decades definitions derived from theoretical assumptions about shared norms, values and assumptions, as well as symbols, myths or rituals, the term 'organisational culture' has been used in relation to higher education to

attempt the impossible task of representing its 'collections' as unitary and explicable and that as such universities do not have a culture.

According to Hofstede et al (1990) the culture of an organisation can be identified based on six independent dimensions:

- Is process or results-oriented
- Is job oriented or employee oriented
- Is parochial or professional in outlook
- Operates in a closed system or an open system where it is subject to a far greater degree to the political, economic, social and technological environment
- Adopts a normative or pragmatic approach; and
- Exercises loose or tight control over its employees

Building on this model and that of Weick (1976), McNay (1995) identify 4 types of higher education cultures:

**Collegial.** That is, a relatively small organisation that emphasises individual autonomy

**Bureaucratic culture.** That is, where great use is made of hierarchies and committees in the decision-making process

**Entrepreneurial culture.** That is, one where there is a keen awareness of the needs and demands of stakeholders in the higher education sector

**Corporate culture.** That is, one where power is centralised and held by an HEI's directorate.

Lomas (1999) describes both Schein's model and McNay's as tools that can be used to examine cultural difference between HEIs at a particular time and that such models point up general but significant differences in the organisational culture of HEIs

### 3.4 Chapter conclusions

Given the above debate on the nature of culture and in particular the focus on the nature of culture in higher education and in the interest of transparency, for the purposes of this research, I have adopted the view that culture exists at an organisational level notwithstanding the assumption that sub-groups are also likely to have their own individual cultures and so I have adopted Martin's middle ground as described earlier in this chapter.

However, at the outset of my research and given the fact that I wanted to look at culture in terms of trying to understand higher education culture experienced by those working in it and, given the fact that I am interested in institutional and organisation-wide considerations in testing out the application of the Model, I have assumed that culture is something that an organisation *is* rather than something that an organisation *has* and so something to be changed. (See section earlier in this chapter about the root metaphor and key variable or application schools of thought). However, I am not saying that culture cannot be changed and this is an issue to which I will return in chapter nine.

My view on the concerns expressed about the nature of culture in higher education is that the position of having sub cultures and layers within a university or college is not any different to that of a large organisation with a range of roles and functions operating within it. I am aware that there is a view that universities *are* different. However, I have had the opportunity through both social and professional occasions to talk to a range of people from a range of professional areas about the applicability of the Excellence Model and I have yet to find someone who does not say that their area of work (whether private or public) is different. We all want to be seen to be unique and we all are in a sense. However, I think that this can also act as a barrier to acceptance of something that is seen as more universal. This is a matter to which I will return in chapter nine on conclusions.

The focus of this research has been on the possible nature of higher education institutions in assessing the extent to which there is such a phenomenon as a higher education culture or cultures and that, if there is such a thing, how that may or may not inhibit the applicability of the Excellence Model. If there are sub cultures, then that would be a factor to take into account in reaching conclusions about the utility of the Model.

Also, given different approaches to the assessment of culture I have adopted an ethnographic strategy as described in chapter three and have attempted to get the 'emic' perspective through participant observation, through speaking to staff in a sample of HEIs. At the same time I have acknowledged that printed materials tell a story about an organisation at least in terms of the messages that they wish to convey to an external readership. It is for these reasons that I have used these methods to enable me to attempt to describe a higher education culture and what that might mean for the application of the Excellence Model.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research strategy and methodology**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present a theoretical underpinning of my approach to this piece of research, describe the research methodology and methods employed and the linkages between them and finally provide a reflective account of the research processes adopted.

#### **4.2 Epistemology**

In this section I describe the epistemology that underpins my approach to this research and then describe the research methods used within that approach.

Research is concerned with understanding the world and this is informed by how we view our world. The view that knowledge is hard, objective and tangible will demand of the researcher an observer role; to see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique imposes on the researcher an involvement with his/her subjects (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This former position is that taken by positivist researchers and the latter by interpretivist ones. The approach taken in this research is that of an interpretive approach which has its roots in philosophy and the human sciences, particularly in history and anthropology. The approach centres on the way in which human beings interpret and make sense of their subjective reality. Central to interpretive research is the view of human nature and social phenomena as complex, intangible and elusive which contrast strikingly with the regularity and order of the natural world.

Interpretive researchers refute criticisms of their approach to research by stressing the depth of immersion in the study, and the length of the observations and interviews. Methodological rigour in interpretive research can be demonstrated through a detailed 'audit trail' where researchers describe the methods adopted and the problems encountered, giving a reflective account. This way, they open up their work to public scrutiny and critical examination. Rigour depends not only on the procedures but also on internal coherence and logic of the work. Validity, or trustworthiness, which demonstrates rigour is the extent to which the researcher's findings truly reflect the purpose of the study and represent reality. When the research is systematic and evidence-based, it cannot be described as merely impressionistic.

Another concern that is expressed about naturalistic (interpretive) research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) is that of the researcher as part of the social world they study and so how to eliminate the effects of the researcher on the data. Hammersley and Atkinson (ibid) go on to say that all social research in a sense takes the form of participant observation: it involves participating in the social world and reflecting on the products of that participation.

Interpretive researchers use the strategies of observing, questioning and listening, immersing themselves in the 'real' world of the participants; they explore the ideas and perceptions of the participants, 'the insiders' view', and search for commonalities. It means that researchers attempt to examine the experiences, feelings and perceptions of the people they study, rather than imposing a framework of their own that might distort the ideas of the participants. They 'uncover' the meaning people give to their experiences and the way in which they interpret them, although meanings should not be reduced to subjective accounts of the participants as researchers search for patterns and commonalities. Interpretive researchers would argue that individuals' behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference: understanding of individuals' interpretations of the world around them which has to come from the inside, not the outside. Social science is thus seen as a subjective rather than an objective undertaking, as a means of dealing with the direct experience of people in specific contexts. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). The following extract encapsulates the spirit in which the interpretive researcher would work:

“ The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate to what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with man's definitions of reality and with the rules he devises for coping with it. While the social sciences do not reveal the ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social scientists offer is explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which man has created around himself”. (Beck, 1979)

The researcher is the primary instrument for gathering data. He/she is active, not natural and detached. The researcher realises that only humans have the responsiveness and adaptability to grasp and evaluate the complexities of technical, political and cultural means, to generate hypotheses on the spot, to take opportunities to clarify and summarise and to probe responses. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend that the researcher gives an account of him/herself as a human being so that readers can understand more about the human filter through which the research material passes. To that extent in the section 4.10

and throughout the chapter I provide a reflective account of my position as a human being and research instrument.

I believe that it is important to understand oneself, one's motives and how one impacts on others to function fully as a human being. To this end I have undertaken a number of courses on subjects that would require such an approach from me. I am thinking here particularly of courses in counselling which require one to look at oneself in an attempt to be able to assist others so that one does not impose one's own values on that other person. Particular tools which I have used in this respect are Transactional Analysis<sup>7</sup> and Enneagrams<sup>8</sup> both of which present theories of personality and provide tools for personal growth and personal change. From these analyses I see myself as someone who likes to get things done, who enjoys a sense of achievement and who is proactive in my style of problem solving. I believe that these have been helpful qualities through the process of this research as they have helped me to make sense of quantities of data which have at times felt quite messy. However, my desire to create coherence and my strong sense of persistence have kept me going. I have been aware too of the potential for my desire for coherence to possibly create a rationale which did not exist. It is for this reason that I have included details of the transcripts in the interests of transparency.

I invest a lot of time in building and maintaining relationships which are an important part of my life. I am not particularly gregarious but know how to engage people in conversation and how to maintain a discussion. These qualities have been extremely useful throughout this research both in the participant observation and also in the interviews where I have needed to make people feel at ease to enable me to get from them their sense of their culture.

Additionally, I am quite self-critical and would be more likely to be critical of myself than others are of me. This means that I engage often in high levels of reflection and self-questioning. Personally, I think these qualities are helpful in interpretive research where there is the need to be constantly thinking about what one is doing, what others are doing and saying.

In terms of my learning styles (Kolb, 1985, Honey and Mumford, 1986) I tend towards the 'diverging'/'reflector' with an orientation for looking at things from different points of view, using

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<sup>7</sup> Transactional analysis is a theory of personality and systematic psychotherapy for personal growth and change

<sup>8</sup> The Enneagram is a geometric figure that delineates nine basic personality types of human nature and their complex interrelationship

imagination to solve problems and gathering, pondering and analysing data. Kolb called this style 'diverging' because these people perform better in situations that require ideas generation and gathering information. In terms of Honey and Mumford's learning styles I fall into the 'reflector' category as someone who liked to stand back, ponder and analyse. These qualities I believe were helpful in enabling me to think and re-think about the data gathering and analysis processes.

Although I am quite reflective I do also have a pragmatic element to my personality and can get to a point of thinking that a piece of work or assessment is 'good enough'. This was something that I had to guard against, particularly as I was nearing the end of working on my thesis. However, I do not believe that it impacted on the data gathering nor data analysis processes as I was sufficiently aware of this quality to not let it get in the way.

With respect to the subject matter of this thesis I have fairly extensive knowledge of the Excellence Model and have experience of its efficacy. It probably was my assumption at the outset that it could be applied to higher education although I was also aware of the fact that something seemed to be inhibiting that development and so I was keen to understand better what that might be. I was open to the possibilities of what that something might be. As Fetterman (1998) said the researcher enters the field with an open mind and not an empty head. This reflects accurately my position.

As far as my views on the world of knowledge is concerned I believe in the subjectivity of the individual perspective. Truth may be out there but the individual is not likely to know that and is likely to see truth as he/she perceives it. The following quote from the bible reflects this perspective:

'Consider carefully what you hear' he continued. 'With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.' (Mark 4, verses 24-25)

My teaching bible suggests that this passage is meant to indicate that the light of Jesus' truth is revealed to us, not hidden. However, we may not be able to see or to use all of that truth, right now. That, only as we put God's teachings into practice, will we understand and see more of the truth. The truth is clear, but our ability to understand is imperfect. As we obey, we will sharpen our vision and increase our understanding. I believe that this philosophy has a natural resonance with the interpretive paradigm and fits well with my views on the nature of knowledge.



### **4.3 Significant research traditions and the one adopted in this research**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) describe three significant traditions in the interpretive paradigm. They are phenomenology, ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. The tradition which I have followed in this research is that of ethnomethodology which is concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world. More especially, it is directed at the mechanisms by which participants achieve and sustain interaction in a social encounter – the assumptions they make, the conventions they utilise and the practices they adopt. According to the naturalistic account, the value of ethnography as a social research method is founded upon the existence of variations in cultural patterns across and within societies, and their significance for understanding social processes. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p9). My reasons for choosing ethnomethodology are as much to do with what that approach offered me as it was with that which the other two did not.

I rejected two other approaches for the reasons given below. In its broadest meaning phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value and one that sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external objective and physically described reality (English and English, 1958). Husserl (1931), regarded by many as the founder of phenomenology, was concerned with questioning the commonsense, 'taken-for-granted' assumptions of everyday life. To do this he set about opening up a new direction in the analysis of consciousness which for him meant finding out how things appear directly to us rather than through the media of cultural and symbolic structures. In other words we are to look beyond the details of everyday life to the essences underlying them. This process involved the participants in a process of understanding almost like a psychotherapist with a client. Given my research questions and a desire to understand higher education culture, if such a thing existed, from what people imputed and from symbolic and cultural assignments within printed material, this was not an appropriate approach to take. Whilst I was interested in how my subjects interpreted their own actions, I was also keen to see what interpretations I could take from what they said.

The notion of symbolic interactionism derives from the work of G.H Mead (1934). The term does not represent a unified perspective in that it does not embrace a common set of assumptions and concepts accepted by all who subscribe to the approach. Interactionists focus on the world of subjective meanings and the symbols by which they are produced and represented. This would have meant not making any prior assumptions about what is going

on in an institution, and taking seriously, indeed, giving priority to participants' own accounts. In focusing on the interaction itself as a unit of study, the symbolic interactionist creates a more active image of the human being and rejects the image of the passive, determined organism. Given this focus on interaction and given the fact that I wanted to look at organisational drives and features part of which would be interactions rather than interactions per se I judged this approach was not the most useful one for my purposes.

Earlier in this section I stated that ethnomethodology was directed at the mechanisms by which participants achieve and sustain interaction in a social encounter – the assumptions they make, the conventions they utilise and the practices they adopt. On reflection, I believe still that ethnomethodology offered my research the opportunity to consider the internal mechanisms that might facilitate or hinder the application and applicability of the Model, that it allowed me to see it from others' points of view both in terms of the applicability of the Model per se as well as an insight into the assumptions made, the conventions utilised and the practices adopted that might constitute a culture. Fetterman (1998) states that ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture and describes that task in a similar way to that of an investigative reporter. This is what I wanted to achieve – to seek out the cultural perspectives about higher education as seen from those working within it and to describe such perspectives and evaluate their significance in relation to the applicability of the Model.

#### **4.4 Locating a field of study**

Bogdan and Bilken (1992, p2) suggest that research questions are formulated in situ and in response to situations observed, that is, that topics are investigated in all their complexity, in their naturalistic context. In the following sections I explain the research process and questioning that I have conducted in the course of this research.

I first heard about the Excellence Model (or the Business Excellence model as it was called at the time) during my Masters in Business Administration (MBA) studies. I liked the idea of a holistic approach to quality and the fact that someone or some people had taken the time and trouble to attempt to identify what excellence looked like. Later, I worked with the British Quality Foundation as an assessor which provided me with the opportunity to work with other people from a range of organisations both public and private in a team of assessors working on the submissions made by organisations wishing to be considered for the annual British Quality Foundation's Award process. These applications came from both the private and public sectors. However, I think it is fair to say that some of the public sector organisations

felt that the Model did not always fit the contours of their work given matters like their little control over budget and the generation of income. However, there were others (Reed, 1997, Lundquist, 1996) who felt that there were no systemic obstacles to the successful use of the Model and its associated tool of self-assessment both in public sector organisations in general and in higher education in particular. In chapter two I discussed the potentially different ways in which the process of self-assessment might be perceived in the public and private sectors. Additionally, in chapter two I discussed self-assessment as an aspect of the Excellence Model and how it is understood in higher education in relation to the applicability of the Model to higher education.

Higher education is an environment which has enthralled me. Having worked in the higher education sector for twenty years I have been aware of some common elements and some differences. I was fascinated, therefore, to bring these three strands of knowledge of the Excellence Model combined with an interest in organisational culture and higher education together and to consider the questions of the applicability of the Excellence Model to higher education and to consider, above all, whether a higher education culture existed that might help or hinder the implementation of such an approach to culture.

Therefore, I Initially developed the research question of:

1. How far (if at all) can the EFQM Excellence Model be used in higher education institutions? It is this question which took me down the road of trying it out in an institution with which I was familiar and so employing the research method of participant observation. Given the fact that I was aware of two consortia in England that had received funding from HEFCE to consider the applicability of the Excellence Model and also of the outcomes of those projects I still wanted to try this out for myself and to learn therefrom in a direct rather than indirect way. The main questions for me in undertaking the use of the Model to self-assess aspects of the organisation's effectiveness and efficiency was the extent to which the Model and the self-assessment process could be used in higher education to engender a culture of reflection and to facilitate improvement particularly in the context of external requirements of the QAA and internal quality improvement processes.

Another aspect of my MBA studies was that of strategic management. Organisational culture was identified as an important organisational ingredient, the 'glue' that held an organisation together. At that time most of the organisations which I looked at in cultural terms were private sector ones. However, the idea that culture could influence how an organisation

functioned, and went about its 'business' intrigued me, no matter whether it was a public sector or private sector one. However, given the fact that I had worked all of my working life in the public sector, this was the sector that I was more interested in. I think the close connection with people interested me too in that people make up an organisation, whether public or private, and as such impact on and at the same time are consequences of the culture. It seemed to me that it was an important element which, although apparently intangible, had a significant impact on the way in which an organisation saw and conducted itself. So, once I had conducted the self-assessment exercise in 'Clock' College and the desk research of applying the Model criteria to higher education I developed a second research question:

2. Do higher education institutions have a common culture? Because other HEIs had used the Model, from which there was variable feedback in terms of its applicability, I suspected I would find that there were hindering and facilitating factors in the utility of the Model in higher education. This turned out to be the case as can be seen from chapter nine. This suggested that there might be something unique about the higher education sector, either in terms of a common culture or in terms of a sector that was so non-uniform that no generalisations could be made and which might help or hinder the use of the Model and so this research question reflects that consideration. My view was too, that if the answer to question two was yes, then I wanted and needed to know what that looked like in practice and how that culture impacted on the use of the Excellence Model as a result. If the answer to question two was no, then I wanted to consider whether there were any common features that might facilitate or hinder the application of the Model.

#### **4.5 Research methods**

Fetterman (1998) says that specific methods and techniques will guide the ethnographer in the process of data collection and analysis. Because I was already experienced in interpersonal skills, given my professional background, I decided to employ two methods commonly used within ethnographic research – that of participant observation and interviews.

There are two principal kinds of observation, that of participant observation and non-participant observation. In the former, observers engage in the very activities they set out to observe; non-participant observers, on the other hand, stand aloof from the group activities they're investigating and eschew group membership. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001).

The position which I adopted in a part of this research was that of the former – that is, participant observation where I took a role as a member of the group in the same way as any other member. Because I thought that, in the circumstances where I was already known by the participants and that I knew them, it would be more inhibiting for me to act in a non-participant role, I opted to take a participatory role within the research.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that, even where the researcher is researching a familiar group or setting, the participant observer is required to treat this as 'anthropologically strange' in an effort to make explicit the presuppositions he or she takes for granted as a culture member. I took this as good advice in relation to my research and describe in section 4.6.2.1 the approaches taken to enable me to meet this objective.

Fetterman (1998) describes the interview as the ethnographer's most important data gathering technique, in that interviews explain and put into a larger context what the ethnographer sees and experiences. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) say that interviewing can be an extremely important source of data in that it may allow one to generate information that it would be very difficult, if not impossible to obtain otherwise – both about events and about perspectives and discursive strategies. It was for these reasons that I decided to engage in a round of interviews as well as the participant observation. A potential disadvantage with interviews as a research method is the way in which the researcher can influence the interviewees' responses. In sections 4.9.1.2 and 4.9.2.2 of this chapter I describe the approaches taken to attempt to reduce this influence.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) propose an eleven-stage model to the planning of naturalistic research. One of those is data collection outside the field. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify data collection from non-human sources including documents and records having the attraction of always being available. All of these researchers suggest that in order to be able to make comparisons and to suggest explanations for phenomena, researchers might find it useful to go beyond the confines of the groups in which they occur. So, I decided to do just that in taking the criteria of the Model and using my knowledge of the higher education sector to look at the extent to which it would be possible to use the language and concepts of the Model. I describe in more detail the purpose and process of this method in section 3.6. The outcomes of this piece of desk research are to be found in chapter five.

Additionally, another data collection process outside the field was that of using the printed materials of twenty higher education institutions to gather data about their cultural elements.

I describe in more details the purpose and process of this method in section 4.9.1 and the outcomes of this piece of desk research are to be found in chapter seven.

So, I had four data collection methods:

- Desk research using the criteria of the Model (section 4.6.1)
- Self-assessment (participant observation) using the workshop approach described in chapter 2, section 2.7 (section 4.6.2)
- Analysis of the printed materials of twenty HEIs (section 4.9.1.1)
- Interviews with members of staff in nine of the twenty HEIs in the sample (section 4.9.1.2)

Table 4 demonstrates the research method used and for what purpose.

Research question	Data collection (in the field)	Data collection outside the field
Applicability – do the criteria fit the contours of higher education?	Self-assessment using the workshop approach described in chapter 2 (section 4.6.2)	Desk research using the criteria (section 4.6.1)
Applicability – does the culture of higher education (if such a thing exists) hinder or help the applicability of the Model?	Interviews with members of staff in some of the 20 HEIs in the sample (section 4.9.1.2)	Printed materials of 20 HEIs (section 4.9.1.1)

**Table 4: Research method and purpose**

**Source: Research**

Instead of conducting controlled experiments, the researcher explores the complexity of the real world and is not put off by the fact that data is messy and untidy. The researcher needs to become part of the setting so as not to be a disturbing element, but not so much so that he/she loses the advantage of being an outsider. The researcher must stay long enough in the setting to identify and then study the salient features but not so long that she/he feels totally involved in it. My research includes elements conducted in the natural setting as well as data collection methods outside the field. I believe that this approach has provided data that is messy and unstructured but which in turn has provided a plethora of perspectives and views to enable me to make sense of the research questions.

I believe that my involvement in the self-assessment process as described in section 4.6.2 undertaken by the Task Force in 'Clock' College was beneficial in that it enabled me to be completely immersed in the exercise being undertaken by the others. My decision not to run the training sessions on both the Model and the process of self-assessment was a good one in that it enabled me to be a member of the group as any other member of the Task Force. I was, however, aware that the others might perceive me as an expert in this area and so I was careful to assume a 'back seat'. Because the tutor who ran the initial sessions did not take part in the data gathering process to undertake a self-assessment against the Model criteria, it was useful at that point to be able to have someone else in the Group who knew about the Model and so I could adopt a participant role like the others in the group.

I was persuaded that printed materials could tell you something about the culture of an organisation and so I set off on that tack of obtaining their publicly available materials for the twenty HEIs in my sample. This was time consuming but not too difficult to achieve. However, what I felt quite quickly was that I was being presented with the public face of the organisation and not necessarily seeing what went on inside. There is no doubt that the method told me quite a lot about what the institution wanted me to know about it and that in itself said quite a lot about how it wanted to come across primarily to prospective students and their parents.

With respect to the interviews I enjoyed this part of the data collection enormously. This is my natural milieu. I had thought about immersing myself completely in one institution and decided that I needed a greater cross section in the interests of triangulation and potential generalizability. Given the way in which similar threads and themes ran through the interviews I am glad that I took this approach rather than the one particular to only one HEI. On reflection it might have been helpful to have ensured that all levels and kinds of staff in HEIs were included in the sampling process. However, I think I would still argue for the way in which I conducted the research in that the same themes did come through from those interviews demonstrating an agreement across those interviewed at least of those issues that were important and significant in HEIs.

The following paragraphs in this chapter describe my data collection and analysis processes for each of the four data gathering methods employed in the following sections.

## **4.6. Data collection**

### **4.6.1 Applicability of Model criteria to higher education through desk research using the Model criteria**

As stated previously in this chapter in section 4.4 I was familiar with the Model and its component parts. My knowledge of higher education came from having worked in higher education for nearly twenty years. It has to be said that this experience was in particular areas of higher education: firstly, in a small specialist college and secondly in a newly designated higher education college. At the same time, however, I had been involved in meetings and discussions, training sessions and seminars and conferences with staff from the higher education sector. I believe that this experience in both the Model and higher education enabled me to take that understanding and to apply one to the other – that is, taking the Model criteria and looking for processes, people and systems which would relate to those.

### **4.6.2 Applicability of Model criteria to higher education through participant observation**

As can be seen from section 4.5 and Table 4 the purpose behind the participant observation research method was to test out the applicability of the Model in relation to the contours of higher education by undertaking a self-assessment process using the workshop<sup>9</sup> approach described in chapter two. So, data collection in relation to this research method consisted of:

- 4.6.2.1 Gathering data against the Model criteria using a method commonly used with the Model;
- 4.6.2.2 Collecting views from members of the Task Force involved in the self- assessment process about both the process and the utility of the Model for higher education;
- 4.6.2.3 Involving the members of the Task Force to test out their views on the applicability of the Model to higher education given potential implementation issues

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<sup>9</sup> With this approach to self-assessment an organisation is responsible for gathering data and evidence which is presented at a workshop. This data provides the starting point for the team to reach consensus on the strengths, areas for improvement and to score the organisation.



For the participant observation I selected a higher education institution which I will name 'Clock' (a higher education college). This was chosen for a number of reasons:

- firstly, it is the higher education institution with which I was most familiar and which allowed me access to a range of staff in terms of seeking volunteers as well as having a foot in the door that would enable me to seek volunteers in the first instance;
- secondly, I was interested in the implementation aspect of the Model and this would be more easily achieved, if this turned out to be a possibility, in an institution with which I was familiar.

In the following sections I say more about the specifics of each of the above data collection methods.

#### **4.6.2.1 Gathering data against the Model criteria using a method commonly used with the Model**

I set out to find a group of staff members inside the institution who would constitute a Task Force<sup>10</sup> to gather data against the criteria of the Model in the same way as would be done through a workshop approach to self-assessment<sup>11</sup> (as described in chapter two, section 2.7). My role in this was to be a member of that Task Force.

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<sup>10</sup> The Task Force was made up of a number of members of staff from 'Clock' College who were trained to undertake a self-assessment against the Model criteria and who then gathered data and evidence in relation to the Model criterion parts

<sup>11</sup> Self-assessment is a process by which an organisation assesses itself against the Model criteria in an effort to identify its strengths, areas for improvement as a result of which it can produce an action plan as a contribution to its continuous improvement

To enable me to maintain a level of objectivity in the research and to ensure involvement from academic staff I invited a member of the Business School staff who specialised in the area of quality management to work as project co-ordinator<sup>12</sup>. His role was to organise the training for the Task Force members and to provide administrative support to the project. Fortunately, he agreed and we worked together in putting together a submission to obtain funds from our internal Research Committee. This proposal was successful and we were given enough money to pay for the consultant referred to later in this section.

At the same time however, I did not want to create some kind of 'Hawthorne'<sup>13</sup> effect by setting up a self-assessment process within 'Clock' college for those involved to feel that they needed to perform in particular ways as a result. It was for this reason that I involved someone else in the planning of the project and used a consultant to teach the staff who were going to undertake a self-assessment of the College against the Model criteria. I wanted to keep the process as similar as possible to that employed by an organisation using the Model criteria to undertake self-assessment as part of a quality improvement programme, rather than it be seen as a research project per se.

I was very aware of my potential to skew the process given my knowledge of the Model and the associated self-assessment processes and took conscious steps to mitigate these. These included employing the consultant when I could have led the training sessions myself; adopting a participant role rather than a lead role; and asking two members of the Task Force about the extent to which I had influenced the process. The consultant was someone who knew both about the Model and about higher education as he had been involved with the Liverpool John Moores HEFCE funded project described in chapter two.

The main issue that I had to address with the Task Force members was that of informed consent (to participate and for disclosure), that is, overt or covert research. My view was that I wanted this to be an overt operation and as such my way of dealing with some of the ethical issues was to offer confidentiality to all those involved enabling them to feel able to say what they wanted to say. Also, I sought volunteers. Additionally, I needed to think about my own

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<sup>12</sup> The Project Co-ordinator was someone who could organise the training and liaise with the consultant employed to take the members of the Task Force through that training and who advised on the approaches to data collection of evidence in relation to the Model criterion parts

<sup>13</sup> Individual behaviours may be altered because they know they are being studied. This was demonstrated in a research project (1927 - 1932) of the Hawthorne Plant of the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois.

role in the process, as I had been the person who had initiated the project in the first place. I was aware of the possibilities of familiarity with the institution and with the Model and what that might mean to my research. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) say that minimising the influence of the researcher is not the only, or always even a prime, consideration. Also, assuming we understand how the presence of the researcher may have shaped the data, we can interpret accordingly and it can provide important insights, allowing us to develop or test elements of the emerging analysis. They argue further that the aim is not to gather 'pure' data that are free from potential bias, as there is no such thing, but, rather, to discover the correct manner of interpreting whatever data we have.

The EFQM Excellence Model itself does not provide any criteria for Task Force numbers and selection. For an institution the size of 'Clock' a group of nine people seemed adequate. I asked for volunteers by distributing e-mails throughout 'Clock' College describing the research project and the work involved. This generated an immediate response from two people which I saw as positive but subsequently as disappointing in that no further enquires came from that method of seeking volunteers. I wanted too, a cross section of staff from a range of functions within the College. As such, the project coordinator identified possible people to talk to about the project and to test out their interest. As a result of these processes we ended up with a team of nine people, including four members of academic staff, one from student services, one a catering manager, one from IT, myself and the Principal. In any change management process the commitment of the leaders of the organisation is essential. To that end the Principal of the College agreed to be a member of the Task Force. Whilst I did not ask him the extent to which he was able to forget that he was the Principal of 'Clock' what I observed was someone who was open and prepared to consider other views as they were expressed through the discussions taking place about the evidence found. At the same time it needs to be recognised that everyone was coming to the subject matter from their own perspectives to a certain extent and that his was yet another that was offered as a contribution to our understanding of the applicability of the Model to higher education. However, I think too that the process of self-assessment and the way in which the data was gathered for self-assessment purposes encouraged the members of the Task Force to attempt to consider the organisation more widely and objectively than they had perhaps done previously.

The external consultant employed provided the training, which lasted two days and covered:

- A description of the EFQM Excellence Model
- The principles underpinning the Model

- Practical exercises in using the Model for self-assessment purposes
- Scoring criteria
- Self-assessment processes

The following week the Task Force members met again without the consultant. The reason for the members of the Task Force undertaking this exercise on their own was to enable them to take ownership of the process in identifying whom they were planning to interview and the questions they were to use, so that they could gather appropriate evidence stage of the process. By this stage one member of the Task Force had had to drop out due to work pressures. The remaining eight members were split into two teams of three and one of two. Each of the three groups of the Task Force had its own criterion parts of the EFQM Excellence Model to gather evidence against. (There are nine criteria). This was done by each member of the Task Force indicating which of the criterion parts they wished to seek information on. To identify appropriate people to interview we sought those who were significant players in relation to that criterion part. This process is described in Table 5.

<b>Model criterion</b>	<b>Staff interviewed</b>
Leadership	Principal Assistant Principals (2) Head of School (1) 3 academic members of staff
Policy and strategy	Principal Assistant Principal (Academic)
People	HR Director Head of (Support) Department
Partnerships and resources	Director of Finance Assistant Principal with responsibility for estates IT Manager
Processes	Assistant Principal (Academic) Director of Quality 2 members of academic committees (4)
Customer results	Registry Manager A School Administrator Assistant Principal (Academic)
People results	HR Director

Society results	Assistant Principal with responsibility for estates
Key performance results	Principal Director of Finance

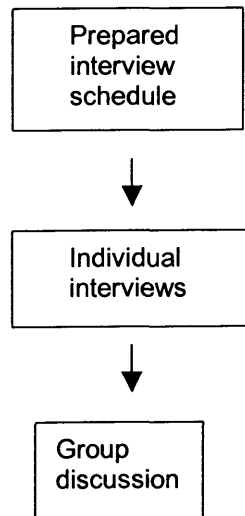
**Table 5: Staff interviewed against the Model criteria**  
**Source: Research**

The questions asked by each group were determined by the group members themselves based on the training to date. Each interview with these significant players lasted between half an hour and one hour. Some of those identified as appropriate from whom to gather evidence were interviewed more than once e.g. the Principal was interviewed on leadership, policy and strategy and key performance results. Once completed each member of the Task Force was asked to collate and write up their results and to pass them on to the co-ordinator for report production in readiness for the next stage of the process. Additionally, as will be seen from chapter six the consensus process was seen as another way of gaining information about the organisation.

#### **4.6.2.2 Collecting views from members of the Task Force involved in the self-assessment process about both the process and the utility of the Model for higher education**

Part of my data collection process was to collect views from those involved as members of the Task Force, that is, those who had been provided with training in the approach of the Model and who had then used the criteria to gather evidence against the criteria.

The following flowchart shows the methodology used to gather feedback from the participants of the Task Force.



**Figure 2: Data collection approach on the self-assessment process**

**Source: Research**

### **Description of the data collection approach with respect to the self-assessment process**

#### **Prepared interview schedule**

An interview schedule was prepared to be used with all members of the Task Force, which focused on the self-assessment process, and each of the elements seen in figure one in chapter two. The questions were open in an attempt to allow members to reflect on their experiences in an open and honest way. The questions asked are to be found at appendix 07 of this thesis.

#### **Individual interviews**

Each member of the Task Force was interviewed either by myself or by the project co-ordinator using the prepared questionnaire. In each instance the interview was taped with the express permission of the interviewee. The prepared questions were put to all members with some subsequent questions being asked dependent on the direction of the interview.

#### **Group discussion**

The purpose of the group discussion was to see if the views expressed in the individual interviews varied or changed in a collective situation as a result of hearing the views of others expressed. The process adopted was one whereby the project co-ordinator led a

discussion around the questions on the interview schedule to see if the individual views of each member of the Task Force changed any in the light of hearing the views of others.

#### **4.6.2.3 Involving the members of the Task Force to test out their views on the applicability of the Model to higher education given potential implementation issues**

Additionally, I wanted to consider how one might go about implementing such an approach as the Model to quality assurance and enhancement in higher education institutions and so set up an explicit opportunity to do so with the members of the task Force. As such, I arranged for a meeting of the Task Force members to consider in detail how implementation might be effected if the decision was made to take this initiative forward within 'Clock' College. In doing this I was cognisant of one of the main outcomes of self-assessment, that of action planning and improvement. An important part of the self-assessment process is to be able to take the outcomes arising from the assessment undertaken, both the strengths and areas for improvement, and to identify plans for improvement including ways of building on the strengths as well as a means of improving on those areas where action is warranted. Emphasis is on discovery rather than checking out what is already known. The process is one of making sense of field data through content analysis rather than the traditional method of testing a theory.

As stated previously in this chapter I had worked with the British Quality Foundation as an assessor and so knew quite a lot about the self-assessment criteria and process from the assessor's perspective. I think it is also fair to say that I liked the holistic and comprehensive nature of the Model as well as the way in which it generated ideas for improvement. However, with the exercise at 'Clock' College I was one of nine people who were data gathering against the Model criteria. In this way it was quite difficult for me to skew the outcomes, even if I had wanted to. What emerged from that process was as much a surprise to me as it was to the others involved. For example, I was utterly amazed at how much information the members of the Task Force had been able to unearth through the data gathering process. They had interviewed the members of staff listed in Table 5 but it was quite impressive the amount and the quality of the data provided for us to use. Additionally, I was surprised at the way in which the members of the Task Force had enjoyed the experience because they had had the opportunity to find out more about the organisation which had then deepened their understanding of how that part functioned, creating a more unified way of thinking about the institution.

Although I had worked in higher education I have worked in very particular aspects of it and so I was not sure to what extent the cultural aspects of those HEIs might be the same as or different from those which I visited. As such I had not made any prior assumptions about what I might find other than the issues about academic staff commitment to their discipline. (This is an issue which I have discussed in chapter two of this thesis). It is worth noting that the point at which I started the interviews the outcomes from the HEFCE funded projects (Liverpool John Moores, 2003; Sheffield Hallam University, 2003) were not available and so that did not influence my expectations.

## **4.7 Data analysis**

### **4.7.1 Applicability of Model criteria to higher education through desk research using the Model criteria**

I took each of the Model criteria<sup>12</sup> and from my knowledge of both the Model and higher education I worked through each criterion and listed the aspects of the criterion parts to be found in higher education. The outcomes of this analysis are to be found in chapter five.

### **4.7.2 Applicability of Model criteria to higher education through participant observation**

As described in section 4.6.2 there were three aspects to this research method. These are considered below in relation to analytical approaches for each.

#### **4.7.2.1 Gathering data against the Model criteria using a method commonly used with the Model**

To enable me to analyse the data collected using this collection method I employed an approach used within the Award<sup>13</sup> process of the British Quality Foundation, that of reaching a consensus on the data gathered. This process consisted of the members of the Task Force coming together to discuss the data gathered and to score the College based on this

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<sup>12</sup> The Model criteria are; leadership, policy and strategy, people, partnerships and resources, processes, customer results, people results, society results, key performance results

<sup>13</sup> Each year the British Quality Foundation holds an Award process through which organisations choose to submit their evidence in relation to the Model criteria. External people from a range of sectors are trained as assessors and evaluate the evidence presented by each organisation



data. This discussion was led by the consultant employed in the initial training to ensure a fair and comprehensive discussion.

Having collected the data against the Model criteria as described in section 4.7.1 the next stage was that of the Task Force members coming together to discuss their findings and to check their understanding of the findings in advance of scoring the institution and for any additional data to be made available recognising that a range of perspectives is likely to be the case. As a result of this process an agreed set of strengths and areas for improvement for each of the criterion parts were agreed (see appendix 05). What can be seen from this list of strengths and areas for improvement will be considered in chapter six.

Chapter two on the Excellence Model describes the scoring process and highlights the fact that this is an optional approach to self-assessment in that a self- assessment can be undertaken without scoring. The advantages of scoring were viewed as twofold:

- It provides a concrete assessment of the strengths and areas for improvement gathered and so provides an indication of how much is still to be done in these areas; and
- It allows for external benchmarking against other organisations

The disadvantages are that:

- Scoring can be seen as mechanistic; and
- Scoring can be seen to get in the way of the gathering of data and reaching consensus

The Task Force did not decide at the outset if it wanted to score or not as this was not seen as the most important aspect of the exercise. Rather the significance of the self-assessment process was to see if data in relation to the criteria could be collected. However, once a consensual view of the strengths and areas for improvement had been identified the decision to score was taken on the basis of it providing a concrete assessment of what had been obtained.

An explanation of the scoring matrix is provided in appendix 02. Suffice to say that it is based on a system referred to as RADAR . Using this system weights are given to each of the nine criteria. These weights were established in 1991 as a result of a wide consultation exercise across Europe. Since then they have been reviewed from time to time by the

EFQM. Generally speaking each sub-criterion is allocated equal weight within that criterion. For example, 1a attracts one quarter of the points allocated to criterion 1. However, there are three exceptions:

1. Sub-criterion 6a takes 75% of the points allocated to criterion 6, whilst sub-criterion 6b takes 25%;
2. Sub-criterion 7a takes 75% of the points allocated to criterion 7, whilst sub-criterion 7b takes 25%;
3. Sub-criterion 8a takes 25% of the points allocated to criterion 8, whilst sub-criterion 8b take 75%

The first step to scoring is to use the RADAR scoring matrix to allocate a percentage score to each sub-criterion. This is achieved by considering each of the elements and attributes of the matrix for each of the sub-criteria in the Model. A scoring summary sheet (see appendix 02) is then used to combine the percentage scores awarded to the sub-criteria to give an overall score on a scale of 0-1000 points.

Having identified and agreed strengths along with areas for improvement the next step was to create an action plan that would move the College forward on its quality journey.

#### **4.7.2.2 Collecting views from members of the Task Force involved in the self-assessment process about both the process and the utility of the Model for higher education**

I followed the following steps in analysing the data collected by this method:

1. Initially, I listened to each tape myself as this provided me with an initial overview of the points being made by those interviewed
2. I then transcribed the tape verbatim to ensure that I had captured everything that had been said.
3. My approach to then analysing the interview transcripts was to take each question in turn and to list the responses from each member of the Task Force. This gave me seven (excluding my own) responses to each question.
4. I noted all the points made as can be seen from chapter six on research outcomes for this research method.

#### **4.7.2.3 Involving the members of the Task Force to test out their views on the applicability of the Model to higher education given potential implementation issues**

A usual outcome of the production of action plans is to deal with the areas for improvement identified through the self-assessment process. To enable us to consider the outcomes of the self-assessment process in the context of higher education we used Lewin's (1951) Force Field Analysis approach to planning and implementing a change management programme. As such a list of driving and restraining factors to the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model to 'Clock' College was identified. Driving factors are seen as those forces affecting a situation that are pushing in the desired direction. They tend to initiate a change and keep it going; restraining factors are forces acting to restrain or decrease the driving forces e.g. apathy and hostility. Lewin's (ibid) own position was that it is better to reduce the restraining forces (lowers the temperature) than to increase the driving factors (raises the temperature). The analytical approach that I took in relation to this data collection method was to facilitate a meeting of the Task Force members whereby they:

1. Identified both the driving and restraining factors in implementing the Model in 'Clock' College
2. Applied a weighting factor to each of those criteria to indicate significance
3. Discussed and listed the ways in which these restraining factors could be mitigated with the helping ones to move this implementation forward.

The outcomes of this analysis are to be found in chapter six.

#### **4.8 Conclusions from the Desk Research and Participant Observation**

When I had undertaken both of the above research methods it seemed to me as a result that the Model was applicable to higher education in that I had been able to apply the criterion parts as a piece of desk research and also had used both the criteria and the self-assessment process so integral to the use of the Model in a higher education environment. As such I had to consider why the Model was not being used more extensively or commonly in higher education. Chapter two describes too the outcome of other HEIs which had undertaken a similar exercise.

I thought at this stage of using the Model in a number of other HEIs. However, I was aware by this time of the HEFCE funded projects looking at the applicability of the Model and it seemed

to me that they were already doing this. Additionally, I had always been interested in organisational culture as I have said before and so I decided that I would attempt to identify a higher education culture (if such a thing existed) and how that culture could help or hinder the applicability of the Model.

#### **4.9 Applicability - assessment of higher education culture**

Many methods to assess culture have been identified and employed. These include qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative methods include interviews, group discussions and some questionnaires whereas the quantitative ones tend to use of questionnaires. There is little agreement among researchers about how to assess culture. The type of methodology deemed appropriate depends largely on the definition of culture used by the researcher and the purpose of the research. If organisational culture is defined as espoused beliefs and values, a myriad of straightforward research tools are available for use from the human relations school. These include questionnaires, inventories and structured individual and group interviews etc. If it is accepted that significant differences exist between espoused values and values in use (Argyris and Schon, 1978), then quantitative questionnaire approaches must be rejected, as they will not get sufficiently beneath the surface of people's beliefs. Instead qualitative research methods are called for. In this research I have tended towards the latter position on the basis that it is more consistent with social and organisational psychological research evidence and the interpretive paradigm.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) describe the ethnographer as the methodological omnivore identifying no single prescription for the data collection instruments used. The interpretive researcher may use quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches but tends to have a preference for qualitative data gathering which is more adaptable to complex situations. This involves methods like interviewing, observing and taking account of non-verbal behaviour and document analysis.

All of the approaches which I have taken are qualitative. How one chooses to study culture will depend on how one views it. Earlier in this chapter I stated that many methods to assess culture have been identified and employed. These include qualitative and quantitative approaches. The type of methodology deemed appropriate depends largely on the definition of culture used by the researcher and the purpose of the research. If organisational culture is defined as espoused beliefs and values, a myriad of straightforward research tools are available for use from the human relations school. These include questionnaires, inventories and structured individual and group interviews etc. If it is accepted that significant

differences exist between espoused values and values in use (Argyris and Schon, 1978), then quantitative questionnaire approaches must be rejected. Instead qualitative research methods are called for (Locatelli and West, 1996). This is because there is a need in such circumstances to look beneath the surface of information to a deeper understanding of what is understood and done as a contribution to organisational values. In this research I have tended towards the latter position and so have adopted qualitative methods. I do not regret that decision as my view of culture has not changed as a result of this research. In fact I would say that I probably feel more strongly that there is a difference between espoused values and values in use.

I looked at the literature on both the nature of and the means of assessing and researching culture. Geertz (1973, p5) stated that the analysis of culture is 'not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning'. Thus, studying organisations and their people requires a careful search for subtle, elusive meanings – not in the overt, conscious attitude and explanations of its members, but in the latent expressive implications of the cultural forms in use, a philosophy which is commensurate with my ethnographic approach to this research. As a result of my reading I decided to take an eclectic model of culture and to devise a questionnaire that reflected that. At this stage I was not so interested in the underpinning principles of the Excellence Model and the extent to which evidence for those could be found in higher education institutions; rather I wanted to identify the general cultural elements of higher education, if those existed, which would enable me to then make an assessment of the ways in which this culture facilitated or hindered the application of the Model. I felt that to take the underpinning principles of the Model and attempt to see if those could be found in the culture and workings of higher education institutions would have too simplistic an exercise to do. What I really wanted to uncover was the essential elements of higher education, if that existed, and to be able to then consider the extent to which those elements helped or hindered the application of the Model. After all, I was sure from my initial desk research of applying the Model criteria to higher education that it could be done. What I wanted to do was to tease out the cultural elements of higher education as people working in the institutions saw them and then look at how they connected or failed to connect with the Model. Consequently, in the prompt sheet used in the interviews are to be found elements of culture as described by authors on the subject: Johnson and Scholes 2002), Schein (1985), Rolinson, Broadfield and Edwards (1998) and Haberberg and Rieple (2001). Copy of this prompt sheet can be found at appendix 07.

**4.9.1 Data collection**

**4.9.1.1 Printed materials**

I used printed materials of the twenty HEIs in my sample to see what messages they conveyed about their cultures. A rationale for undertaking this exercise was that as well as it not being possible to interview representatives from all twenty institutions, I felt too that it must be possible for printed literature to say something about how that institution perceived itself and so provide an indication of what was important for that particular institution and so an insight into its culture. At the same time I recognised that the function of a prospectus was to promote the best features of an institution. However, I felt too that through a deeper analysis of what the printed material said and did not say I would be able to compare and contrast the outputs in determining what such material said both about individual cultures and about higher education culture as a whole (if such a thing existed). In chapter seven I will describe the outcomes of this method of data collection and analysis and provide examples of what the literature did and did not say and the significance of both. At the end of this exercise I did feel that I knew each of these twenty institutions quite well in terms of what they wanted to convey about themselves but at the same time, this process did not allow me to access what they wanted to hide about themselves. Hence one reason for wanting to talk with staff within the HEIs.

To find a sample for the printed materials I considered different systems of categorisation to identify an appropriate sample. For example, Peter Andras and Bruce Charlton (2003), lecturers at Newcastle University plotted the entry qualifications against the standing of the university and found an almost linear relationship between those entry qualifications and the league tables. So, one of the categorisations which I considered was that of entry qualifications as described by Andras and Charlton (ibid). Table 6 below shows what that would look like in relation to my sample.

Group	HEIs	Total in Group	Number Selected from that Group	% of total
A	Cambridge Oxford	2	None	
B	Imperial College, London London School of Economics	2	1	
C	Bath Bristol Durham Edinburgh Nottingham Sheffield St Andrews University College London Warwick York	10	2	
D	Aston Birmingham Cardiff Exeter Glasgow King's College, London Lancaster Leeds Leicester Loughborough Manchester Newcastle Queen's University, Belfast Royal Holloway, University of London SOAS Southampton Sussex UMIST	18	3	
E	Aberdeen Aberystwyth Brunel City Dundee East Anglia Essex Goldsmith's Heriot Watt Hull Keele Kent Liverpool Queen Mary University, London Reading Stirling Strathclyde Surrey Swansea Ulster	20	4	
F	Abertay Anglia Polytechnic University Bath Spa University College Bournemouth Bradford Brighton Coventry De Montfort Derby Glasgow Caledonian University Kingston University Leeds Metropolitan Lincoln Liverpool John Moores The London Institute London Metropolitan Luton Manchester Metropolitan Middlesex University			

	Napier University Oxford Brookes University Roehampton University, of Surrey Sheffield Hallam South Bank University Staffordshire University The Robert Gordon University University of Central England in Birmingham University of Central Lancashire University of East London University of Glamorgan University of Gloucestershire University of Greenwich University of Hertfordshire University of Huddersfield University of Northumbria at Newcastle University of Paisley University of Plymouth University of Portsmouth University of Wales, Bangor University of Salford University of Wales College University of Sunderland University of Teesside University of Wales Institute University of Wales, Lampeter University of the West of England University of Westminster University of Wolverhampton	48	8	
G	Bell College Bolton Institute of HE Buckingham Chilterns University College Canterbury Christ Church University College Harper Adams University College King Alfred's Winchester Liverpool Hope Queen Margaret University College St Mary's University College University College Chichester University College Worcester	11	2	
<b>Total</b>		111	20	

**Table 6: Classification based on entry qualifications**

**Source: Andras and Charlton**

Another possible classification was that to be found in The Times University Guide, 2005 which ranks HEIs on the basis of a number of criteria. Table 7 below shows the number of institutions in my sample from each of the ranking groupings:

Ranking Grouping	Number of HEIs in sample
1-25	4
26-50	6
51-75	4
76-100	4
Other	2
<b>Total</b>	20

**Table 7: HEIs by Times University Guide ranking**

**Source: Desk research**



A third possible classification was by age of the institutions on the basis of a perceived correlation between age and reputation. Table 8 below demonstrates what that would look like.

Age classification	Number of HEIs	Number Selected
Ancient	6	1
1800s-1900s	27	7
1950s-1960s	23	2
Post 1992	43	8
Other	12	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>20</b>

**Table 8: Age classification of HEIs**  
**Source: Desk research**

What can be seen from the above tables is that any of these classifications could be employed to generate a sample of higher education institutions that would be seen to be representative of the sector in some way. Eventually I chose the one based on entry qualifications in that it also related to quality and standards as identified in the league tables. In terms of selecting institutions within each of the groupings I selected those blind having worked out how many from each category I needed on a proportionate basis, that is, I wrote all the names of separate pieces of paper for each category and selected them by picking the names out of a hat. In this way, I started with twenty institutions in my sample, representative of the sector.

In terms of the documents used I accessed each of the HEIs websites and looked for annual reports, strategic plans and teaching and learning strategies, at least some of which were available on all websites. Additionally, I obtained a copy of the current prospectus by telephoning each HEI and asking for one.

#### **4.9.1.2 Interviews**

I made contact in the first instance with the Principal or Vice-Chancellor of each of the twenty institutions in my sample. On the basis of finding a 'foot in the door' I used the name of my supervisor (with his permission) as a means of entry to the HEIs in my sample. A copy of the letter sent to all twenty HEIs is to be found at appendix 06. I was aware that I was leaving the decision about who to see in the hands of vice-chancellors and that it might bias the sample. However, I included in the letter sent to vice-chancellors a sentence indicating that I wanted to speak with someone in the organisation who had experience and/or responsibility for quality matters. In this way I was hopeful that I would be able to access staff at a range of

levels within the organisation. Also, given the fact that I wanted to look at culture of higher education as a whole rather than of any particular institution through this process, I was confident that I would be able to get enough of a feel from my interviewees to enable me to determine if there were apparent common elements that could be described as a common culture

I had sixteen positive responses from HEIs who were prepared to have me visit them and conduct interviews. Of the twenty sent I received initially thirteen replies, eleven of which indicated that they would be happy to meet with me and nominated a point of contact. For the seven from whom I received no response I sent a follow-up letter. This generated another five universities prepared to see me creating a total of sixteen. Of the four left, two responded in the negative and two did not respond.

In total I visited nine HEIs. These were selected on the basis of a mix of institutions and geography. At this stage I was not sure how many institutions I might need to visit to get a feel for higher education culture. However, when I had done nine and begun to see patterns emerging from the data that seemed common I felt that further visits were not necessary. Additionally, I identified the following as reasons for thinking that I had greater coverage of the higher education sector that visits to nine HEIs might suggest:

- When conducting the interviews with the nine institutions' representatives they often made mention of other HEIs that they had worked for and these accounts I have taken on board both in the analysis and in the quotations employed;
- The interviews conducted were in depth and detailed. As such, there was an opportunity to ensure that a comprehensive view had been obtained;
- The staff interviewed were not selected by me and so represented an insight, independent of mine, into the issues under discussion. However, I had to recognise that there may have been some selecting going on within the institution. I had asked for people with responsibility for and/or experience of quality. I have to say that given some of the insights provided by some of the interviewees that I cannot imagine that they were chosen because they would necessarily provide a positive or glossy image of the institution;
- The people interviewed came from different aspects of the organisations thereby providing me with a comprehensive take on the culture of the organisations.

Having written to each vice-chancellor and received sixteen positive responses indicating a named person to whom I could correspond, I set about making contact with this person either by e-mail or by phone dependent on the contact details provided. In the course of this communication I outlined the research that I was engaged in and the process which I planned to follow and their part in it. Of the nine people visited all but one were senior people, three Academic registrars with a quality role, two Heads of Quality, one in academic planning, two a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, and one in human resources, a middle manager with a specific project. Although this sample might appear to be skewed in favour of those at the centre of a higher education institution rather than from an academic background four of these people had also taught and been engaged in research (and three of them still were) in higher education at some time and so were able to provide a double perspective on the workings of higher education institutions. Additionally, one had taught in further education. At the same time all of them had worked either in other HEIs or in other aspects of the public sector and so again were able to provide a wealth of experience.

### **Approach to interviews**

I described in section 4.9 the devising of the prompt sheet which I used as a tool in the interviews. I distributed this prompt sheet to all my interviewees to give the some idea of the ground which I might cover and to provide the interviewee with some thinking time. At the beginning of each interview I made this point clear, that is, that I would go where the interview took me.

As described earlier in this section the prompt sheet used in the interviews as an eclectic approach to thinking about culture. In putting the prompt sheet together I adopted the position that culture was a many layered phenomenon (Schein, 1985 and Ott, 1989) and attempted to find ways in my questioning of identifying each of these as can be seen from Table 9:

Aspect of culture	Questionnaire questions
Level 1A – artefacts	7, 8, 10, 13, 11
Level 1B – patterns of behaviour	3, 9, 6,10
Level 2 – patterns and beliefs	4, 5, 12
Level 3 – basic underlying assumptions	1, 2, 9

**Table 9 : Relationship between Relationship between Schein's and Ott's models of culture and interview questions**

**Source: Research**

As described in chapter two the Excellence Model has a number of underlying principles which could constitute a 'culture', a way of doing things. I could, therefore, have taken these principles and attempted to find evidence or not of them. However, I wanted rather to consider the culture of higher education institutions and to then consider the applicability of the Model to that culture. As such, I did not set out to include these particular principles. However, as will be seen from chapter nine I do come back to consider the interrelatedness of the themes which, as a result of this research, I think constitute a higher education culture and these principles.

Before using the prompt sheet I tried it out on a middle manager in 'Clock College' so that I could assess the extent to which it would generate the kind of data that I was looking for. I felt that the questionnaire enabled the interviewees to express themselves and to provide an insight into the workings of their HEI and as a result I tweaked only the language to ensure an appropriate understanding of what I was looking for from the interviewees. Additionally, to provide interviewees an opportunity to say anything about culture they wished to add to the conversation I asked each of them at the end of the interview if there was anything that they wished to add.

My natural orientation is towards people. I have been involved in a 'people business' all of my working life. Additionally, as an experienced careers guidance practitioner used to interviews and as an experienced manager used to working with people I felt comfortable and confident in my communication skills to enable me to create the right kind of environment within which I could seek and elicit the views of those with whom I was working.

I believe that this happened and provide as evidence to support this assertion the quality of the interviews, particularly of the nine HEIs visited. It was also my practice to send in advance of the interview date the questionnaire which I planned to use. In this way I hoped that the interviewee could be reflective and thoughtful about appropriate responses. Each interview lasted between one and a half and two hours suggesting that a degree of time was spent in each instance on the subject of the culture of each institution.

I was thoughtful about my approach to the interview. Given my previous experience of interviewing that was an aspect of the methodology with which I was comfortable. I knew I wanted to ask open questions and encourage the interviewees to talk. I was clear too that the questionnaire acted as a prompt but that I would go where the interviewee took me in terms of content. At the end of each meeting I was careful to ensure that the appropriate ground (i.e. the content of the questionnaire) had been covered albeit in a roundabout way.

I taped the interviews and so they are a verbatim record of what had been said. The interpretation of those was mine but I justify this by saying that, as I had taped the interviews, I was able to extract exactly what each interviewee had said. Also, I was able in the case of one interviewee to ask him to review my analysis which he did and agreed that it reflected accurately what had been said and what he had wanted to say. As such, I felt confident in my ability to do the same with the others.

## **4.9.2 Data analysis**

### **4.9.2.1 Printed materials**

I used the details from the website, annual reports, strategic plans and teaching and learning strategies, if available, and the prospectus to look for important and distinctive messages about the institution. This was a question of judgement about what the institution wished to convey about itself. This might be in the form of words or of pictures. I had no particular idea of what I might find and so took the images as they came. I wanted to identify that which the documents seemed to want to say about the institution and so I was seeking out that which seemed to be significant in terms of each HEI. I did not consider what they might not say until I came to the analysis of the printed materials across all twenty.

I analysed the materials in much the same way as I did for the interviewee transcripts in that I attempted to let the images and words speak for themselves and to make some observations about what appeared to be key messages in each. I took each HEI analysis in turn and

identified the key themes arising therefrom and compared how many times these themes were common across the twenty. There were similar and dissimilar themes coming though the analyses suggesting that there were issue that were common and some that were unique to the institution in question at least in terms of how it was promoting itself. I then made a list of the main issues and then undertook a further analysis of the data to identify the extent to which these issues were common or otherwise within the institutions concerned. The outcomes of these analyses are to be found in chapter seven.

#### **4.9.2.2 Interviews**

In general, ethnographers deal with what is often referred to as 'unstructured' data. That is, the data are not already structured in terms of a finite set of analytical categories determined by the researcher. So, the process of analysis involves, simultaneously, the development of a set of analytical categories that capture relevant aspects of these data and the assignment of particular items of data to those categories. A number of ways of category generation can also be identified. The approach which I have adopted is that of creating codes as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). They suggest that one method (of creating codes) is that of creating a provisional "start list" of codes prior to fieldwork. This list comes from the understanding that the researcher has of the research area. This is an approach which I took given the fact that I had created to some extent a view of culture, designed to produce a semi-structured approach to my interviews.

To meet the above steps I adopted the following process in analysing the data:

1. I transcribed the interview tapes myself to provide me with a feel for the issues and themes coming through the text.
2. I read through the transcripts several times to get a 'feel' for what they were saying and the key themes that seemed to be emerging.
3. I adopted a 'start list' approach to coding the data by reviewing the data line by line within each paragraph. Beside or below the paragraph I generated categories or labels. These labels were reviewed through each transcript. Table 10 below outlines the start list of codes.
4. As a result of an analysis of the transcripts using the start list I then added to it other potential cultural elements until it looked like that in Table 11 below. At that point I revisited each of the transcripts to undertake a further analysis.

5. I then collected the individual codings and assessed their weighting mainly in terms of the number of times this item was mentioned. So, each of the general themes in each transcript can be related back to the code list.
6. I then attempted to make sense of the themes in terms of what they seemed to be saying about a higher education culture to assess if such a thing existed. These outcomes are to be found in chapter eight.

Aspect of Phenomenon (culture)	Code
<b>Change:</b>	C
Response to change	RC
Attitude towards change	AC
Risk-aversion	RAC
Innovation	RI
Consultation	CC (5)
<b>Behaviour:</b>	B
Significant behaviour	SB
Common behaviour	CB
Ways of working	WB
Acceptable behaviour	AB (4)
<b>Values:</b>	V
Academic autonomy	AV
Views of students	SV
Attitudes to teaching	TV
Attitudes to research	RV
Status	STR
Espoused values	EV (6)
<b>Organisation:</b>	O
Efficiency	EO
Effectiveness	FO
Size	ZO
Management	MO
Committee structures	CO
Controls	CTO
Structure	SO (7)

<b>External environment:</b>	E	
Quality	QE	
Competitiveness	CE	
Reputation	VE	(3)
<b>Total</b>		(25)

**Table 10: Start list of codes for analysis**  
**Source: Research**

Aspect of Phenomenon (culture)	Code	
<b>Change:</b>	C	
Response to change	RC	
Attitude towards change	AC	
Risk-aversion	RAC	
Innovation	RI	
Consultation	CC	
Expansion/growth	GC	(6)
<b>Behaviour:</b>	B	
Significant behaviour	SB	
Common behaviour	CB	
Ways of working	WB	
Acceptable behaviour	AB	(4)
<b>Values:</b>	V	
Academic autonomy	AV	
Views of students	SV	
Attitudes to teaching	TV	
Attitudes to research	RV	
Status	STR	
Espoused values	EV	
Academic mindset	MV	
Human dimension	HV	
Student experience	SEV	
Accountability	ACV	(10)
<b>Organisation:</b>	O	
Efficiency	EO	
Effectiveness	FO	
Leadership	LO	
Size	ZO	
Management	MO	
Committee structures	CO	
Controls	CTO	
History	HO	
Ritual	RO	



Structure	SO	
Devolution	DO	(11)
<b>External environment:</b>	E	
Quality	QE	
Competitiveness	CE	
Reputation	VE	
Local community	LE	
Geography	GE	(5)
<b>Total</b>		<b>(36)</b>

**Table 11: Revised code list**  
**Source: Research**

Once I had analysed the transcripts and begun to find themes coming through that analysis I could have sent the analysis back to the interviewee and asked him/her to provide me with a view of whether that analysis reflected accurately the kinds of messages that they had wished to convey. However, I decided not to do so for a number of reasons:

- I had taped the interviews and so had a verbatim account of the interviews
- I had noted not only what was said but the way in which it was said and so was confident that I had created an accurate account
- I did check out my understanding with one interviewee and he confirmed that my analysis was accurate and so I felt confident in my ability to do the same with the others
- I was dealing with busy people and did not want to impose on them excessively

#### **4.10 Reflections**

In section 4.2 I described the features of interpretive research. For example immersion in the study, length of observations and interviews, methodological rigour through an audit trail and the effect of the researcher.

In the course of this chapter I have reflected on the approaches taken, in some instances providing an explanation and justification for the approach taken and elsewhere considering if an alternative one could have been more effective. At all times I have been at pains to provide an audit trail, to provide the reader with a clarity about what I have done and why to meet that aspect of interpretive research identified above – that is, that an audit trail is provided to support the methodological rigour argument. It is for this reason also that I have

included transcripts in the appendices so that the reader can find evidence for himself/herself to support the conclusions reached in the course of both this research and this thesis.

Ethnographic research and its concomitant feature of immersion in the study might have suggested that I investigate one particular HEI rather than a number. However, I felt that I had done that through the participant observation exercise and wanted to see if general themes emerged from a number of institutions that might suggest a common culture, if such a thing existed. I do not regret this approach and felt that this research has been enriched as a result. It is, I believe more difficult to argue that the conclusions reached in this research are because of the particular circumstances in a single HEI. Rather, the fact that general themes emerged suggests that there may be significant features.

I have, too, at all times been aware of my own potential to influence the outcomes and whilst I cannot say with certainty that that has not happened I believe that I took all the steps necessary to mitigate any such influence. The fact that those whom I asked in the participant observation if I had exerted an undue influence reassures me that that had not been the case, and provides me with a degree of reassurance that the approaches that I had put in place to minimise any such influence appeared to have been effective. To be clear, this question was asked of two participants in an open rather than a closed way and so I believe their assertions are an equally open and honest reflection of their views.

However, I am not saying that there is nothing that I would have changed. In particular, I am not sure that the analysis of the printed materials produced what I was looking for in terms of cultural features. Having said that, they did demonstrate the extent to which HEIs are influenced by external and governmental factors to the extent that they were not highly differentiated in the thing which they said about themselves.

My final word on the research methods and approaches taken is that they have provided me with a wealth of data and provided insights into the research questions which I would not have achieved in any other way.

## Chapter 5

### Research outcomes: applicability of the Excellence Model criteria to higher education through desk research using the Model criteria

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the outcomes of the research method outlined in paragraph 4.6.1 on data collection and 4.7.1 on data analysis.

#### 5.2 Research outcomes

Table 12 below shows the work done in taking the Model criteria and applying those to higher education to test out the applicability of the Model from a theoretical perspective.

Excellence Model criterion and definition	Application to higher education
<b>Criterion 1: Leadership</b> How leaders develop and facilitate the achievement of the mission and vision, develop values required for long-term success and implement these via appropriate actions and behaviours, and are personally involved in ensuring that the organisation's management system is developed and implemented.	<b>HE Application</b> A point to note in the EFQM Excellence Model is that the criterion of leadership is not limited to that of the senior management team but to all those in the organisation who have a leading role within the organisation. Each college and university has these people as well as top-level decision makers. So, leaders in an HE context might consist of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ vice chancellors</li><li>➤ pro vice chancellors</li><li>➤ deans</li><li>➤ heads of school/faculty</li><li>➤ course leaders</li><li>➤ directors of finance, marketing, human resources etc.</li><li>➤ members of Senate</li></ul>

	<p>➤ members of Governing Bodies</p> <p>See note 1 below.</p>
<p><b>Criterion 2: Policy and Strategy</b></p> <p>How the organisation implements its mission and vision via a clear stakeholder focused strategy, supported by relevant policies, plans, objectives, targets and processes.</p>	<p><b>HE Application</b></p> <p>Each college and university has a strategic plan, not least because the Funding Councils require one. However, increasingly the need to have a clear sense of direction based on facts and figures as well as intuition is being recognised with an increasingly competitive environment. In the context of HEIs there may be an issue about how far such a plan corresponds with reality. (See note 2 below).</p> <p>Stakeholders might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ customers</li> <li>➤ suppliers</li> <li>➤ partners</li> <li>➤ staff</li> <li>➤ governing bodies</li> <li>➤ employers</li> <li>➤ government of the day</li> <li>➤ students</li> </ul> <p>Information based on performance measurement could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ performance indicator information collected by the Funding Councils and the Higher Education Statistics Agency</li> <li>➤ output from the Research Assessment Exercise</li> <li>➤ Internal performance information e.g. student recruitment, progression, achievement, cohort analysis.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Criterion 3: People</b></p> <p>How the organisation manages, develops and releases the knowledge and full potential of its people at an individual, team-based and organisation-wide level, and plans these activities in order to support its policy and strategy, and the effective operation of its processes.</p>	<p><b>HE Application</b></p> <p>The people of the organisation are the employees and others who directly or indirectly serve its customers (whoever they may be). There is an important issue here within higher education as some academic staff members do not necessarily see themselves as serving the organisation but that of their discipline.</p> <p>See note 3 below.</p> <p>However, this does not get in the way of managing staff appropriate to the structure and culture of the organisation and the elements of this aspect of the EFQM Model would still find a resonance in HE as HR departments have a responsibility for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ People resources are planned, managed and improved</li> <li>➤ People's knowledge and competencies are identified, developed and sustained</li> <li>➤ People are involved and empowered</li> <li>➤ People and the organisation have a dialogue</li> <li>➤ People are rewarded, recognised and cared for</li> </ul>
<p><b>Criterion 4: Partnerships and Resources</b></p> <p>How the organisation plans and manages its external partnerships and internal resources in order to support its policy and strategy and the effective operation of its</p>	<p><b>HE Application</b></p> <p>Educational organisations are often subject to additional constraints, pressures and compliance legislation in managing their financial resources over</p>

processes.

and above that experienced in the private sector. HE institutions have little control over their levels of resource other than their ability to generate additional income. However, they do have control over how they expend that resource and manage it. Moreover, in recent times the Funding Councils have applied a direct correlation between numbers of students and income.

External partnerships are important to all organisations and particularly so to HE institutions working in collaboration with others e.g. further education colleges, employers, other HE institutions.

Resources include:

- finance
- buildings, equipment and materials
- technology
- information and knowledge

See note 4 below.

<p><b>Criterion 5: Processes</b></p> <p>How the organisation designs, manages and improves its processes in order to support its policy and strategy, and fully satisfy and generate increasing value for its customers and other stakeholders.</p>	<p><b>HE Application</b></p> <p>Key processes in higher education relate to the delivery of teaching and assessment of learning and to research. Additionally, there are the processes essential to the running of the organisation, supporting the teaching and learning ones.</p> <p>A process is defined as a sequence of steps which adds value by producing required outputs from a variety of inputs. In HE these might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ teaching</li> <li>➤ assessment</li> <li>➤ validation</li> <li>➤ course monitoring and review</li> <li>➤ research</li> <li>➤ admissions</li> <li>➤ external examining</li> <li>➤ collaborative provision</li> <li>➤ marketing</li> <li>➤ financial management</li> <li>➤ estates management</li> <li>➤ human resource management</li> <li>➤ local support and collaborations with other organisations</li> <li>➤ student support mechanisms</li> </ul> <p>See note 5 below</p>
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<p><b>Criterion 6: Customer Results</b></p> <p>What the organisation is achieving in relation to its external customers.</p>	<p><b>HE Application</b></p> <p>The EFQM Excellence Model does not prescribe where students sit within the structure of the Model. Who an organisation's customers might be is a question for higher education to debate and answer. In fact, it would be possible within the scheme of the Model for each HEI to make a different determination.</p> <p>Customers are the recipients or beneficiaries of the activities, products or services of the educational establishment. To meet this criterion it may be open to question who higher education's customers are. However, whoever they are, there is a need to measure how they view the service or the "product" they receive. The rationale for definitions of customers should be clear, and differences of emphasis or conflicts of interest recognised and their resolution discussed. Possible candidates for this title in HE are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ students</li> <li>➤ HEFCE</li> <li>➤ government</li> <li>➤ society at large</li> <li>➤ employers</li> <li>➤ future society (through the advancement of learning)</li> </ul> <p>See note 6 below</p>
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<p><b>Criterion 7: People Results</b></p> <p>What the organisation is achieving in relation to its people.</p>	<p><b>HE Application</b></p> <p>The people of the organisation are the employees and others who directly or indirectly serve its customers. This criterion part is linked directly to number three, people, described and discussed previously. This criterion should address their satisfaction with the organisation. Some HE institutions do carry out staff surveys to test staff satisfaction levels (Hogan, Johnston and Joyce, 2005). What is required here to fulfil this requirement within the Model is an application and/or extension of these surveys.</p> <p>See note 7 below</p>
<p><b>Criterion 8: Society Results</b></p> <p>What the organisation is achieving in relation to local, national and international society as appropriate.</p>	<p><b>HE Application</b></p> <p>Higher education institutions have an impact on society by the very nature of their primary business (teaching and learning). Additionally, this criterion addresses society results outside of its core business activities and will cover things like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ equal opportunities practices</li> <li>➤ support for medical and welfare provision</li> <li>➤ activities to reduce and prevent nuisance</li> <li>➤ health risks and accidents</li> <li>➤ ecological impact</li> <li>➤ usage of utilities</li> <li>➤ the general cultural life of the</li> </ul>

	communities in which they are situated (Robbins Report)
<b>Criterion 9: Key Performance Results</b> What the organisation is achieving in relation to its planned performance.	<b>HE Application</b> Key performance results relate to whatever the organisation has determined are the essential, observable achievements for its success both in the short term and ongoing with respect to policy and strategy. These measures are financial and non-financial and may include in HE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ students pass/failure rates</li> <li>➤ application rates</li> <li>➤ progression onto other forms of education and training</li> <li>➤ academic results/qualifications</li> <li>➤ indicators required by statute</li> <li>➤ external and internal audits</li> <li>➤ surpluses</li> <li>➤ market share</li> <li>➤ cash flow items</li> <li>➤ balance sheet items</li> <li>➤ research</li> <li>➤ outreach</li> <li>➤ 'etc'</li> </ul>

**Table 12: Relationship between Model criteria and higher education**  
**Source: Research**

**Note 1. Leadership.** Traditionally, academic institutions are among the most highly differentiated and least integrated of organisations. Because free inquiry and autonomy of reason are necessary conditions for academic work, differentiation is intrinsic to the task of discovery and invention (Dill, 1992). Organisational models have stressed ambiguity and loose connections, the lack of relationship between means and ends, and the largely symbolic nature of academic organisation, indirect delegation, increased authority and autonomy to individual departmental members, at the expense of collegial or institutional authority and control.

However, Elton (1988) identifies a shift in the power of the vice-chancellor by the breaking of the unwritten laws (custom and tradition). He argues that this has resulted in a substantial shift in power from the body of the university to its vice-chancellor. Tragically, those who have gained power find it more difficult to exercise it, as those from whom power has shifted lose motivation and interest.

Leadership is *the* significant driving force in the use of the Model. The Model is based on the premise that customer results, people (employee) results and society results are achieved through leadership driving policy and strategy, people, resources and partnerships leading ultimately to excellence in key performance results. So, without effective leadership it is not going to work.

Osseo-Asare and Longbottom (2002) in their research investigating the status of total quality management in a UK higher education institution state that top and middle level management clearly recognised the importance of leadership in their quality management efforts. Equally, Gopal and Tambi's (1999) definition of business excellence in an HE context recognises the significant contribution to be made by leadership making decisions.

In chapter eight I will identify a stalemate position after Jarratt (CVCP, 1985) in that, although there was a general recognition that there was a need for change, many academics fought against it, and, at the same time vice-chancellors perhaps attempted to impose change and thereby did not manage to persuade staff of the need for change. To effect change now it would seem that both academic staff and academic leaders must realise that positive change can emerge from agreements between the two sides to cooperate

Clearly, given what I have said in note 3 about the loyalty of some academic staff the style adopted is crucial to its success in higher education. Some of the above approaches could have a very negative effect in that kind of environment.

**Note 2. Strategy.** There are issues about the extent to which HEIs 'play the game'. When I was undertaking research for my MBA I was looking at the strategic management factors and processes in higher education institutions pre and post 1992. As such, I had twenty HEIs in my sample to which I issued a questionnaire and some of which I visited. During one such visit the vice-chancellor admitted that his HEI had one strategic plan that they sent to the Funding Council, meeting their requirements and one that was used for internal purposes and which reflected more accurately what the institution itself saw as its priorities.

This criterion requires strategy to be based on management information (facts and figures). I think it may be open to question the extent to which this happens in higher education institutions. I have no doubt that there is a lot of management information around but the issue is the extent to which it is used in the service of strategy and policy development.

**Note 3. People.** The way in which academic staff perceive themselves within a higher education institution and the question of where their loyalty lies is a fundamental issue to the nature of higher education and as such one that is likely to have a significant impact on the applicability of the Model. In an 'old' university, the majority of academics (not just 'some') put the discipline above the organisation, without wholly neglecting the latter. (Newby, 1997; Owlia and Aspinall, 1997; Idrus, 1996; Matthews, 1993). It is also an issue to which I will return in both chapters eight and nine.

**Note 4 . Partnerships and resources.** The fact that not a single university has gone bankrupt in the past twenty five years during a time when the student/staff ratio has at least doubled is indicative of the way that HE institutions are able to manage their income levels. Additionally, the extent to which HEIs work with these external partners is open to debate and question and vary from institution to institution.

**Note 5. Processes.** Cohen and March (1986) identify unclear technology as an aspect of 'organised anarchy' which is how they describe the functioning of education institutions generally and higher education institutions in particular. In talking about unclear technology they meant that the organisation did not understand its own processes. Whether this is still the case or not is open to question but it was interesting that one of my HEIs visited (F) had attempted to plot its processes because it felt that there was a lack of clarity about what they consisted of and how they fitted together.

**Note 6. Customers.** There are two overarching "concepts and practices" of TQM: the primacy of the customer and the organisation's culture. Hall (1996) maintains that the concept of the student as customer is very different to the more usual use of the word - where the institution retains the right to "fail" the student and questions if there can be any other market where the supplier is able to take the customer's money, engage in a long complex interaction with them and then refuse to give them the product they want, the degree. However, it could be argued that what students are 'purchasing' is the educational experience and not the obtaining of a degree. This is, of course still a contentious area in that who judges the quality of the experience? If a student fails, s/he is perhaps unlikely to agree that it was a good experience.

Osseo-Asare and Longbottom (2002) recognise the difficulty in applying the word “customers” in an HE environment. They believe that it is a question of terminology which should be resolved by education and training of all personnel involved in quality improvement initiatives so that time is not wasted on what can be described as an “academic” exercise. In this research most respondents identified students as their main customers. This was largely in relation to teaching. However, research is a significant function of higher education and so it would also be necessary to consider who the customers of that research might be. These are likely to be:

- The government
- Those organisations and agencies that commission the research
- Those organisations and agencies that benefit from the research, including e.g. academic colleagues
- Society at large in terms of the availability of new knowledge
- Students who will benefit from new knowledge

Owlia and Aspinall (1996) recognise that the term customer for student has met with resistance from some educationalists who argue that it is only applicable in commercial environments. They express a view that while students are accepted as the primary customer by many authors there are other potential customers like parents, employers, government and society which should also be considered.

Williams (1993) says too that the position of the student is ambiguous as both raw material and customer. Gopal and Tambi (1999) believe that students may perform one of all roles of buyer, user and partners in education.

The issue of how students are perceived within HEIs is an issue to which I will return in my chapter seven on an analysis of the printed materials, in chapter eight on the outcomes from the interview analysis and in the conclusions chapter nine.

**Note 7. People results.** As will be seen from appendix 05 one of the outcomes of the self-assessment conducted in ‘Clock’ College was the lack of staff surveys. Whilst the article (Hogan et al, 2005) in the Association of University Administrators Journal indicated that such approaches to HR management could be effective there are questions about the extent to which such feedback mechanisms from staff are used.

### **5.3 Chapter conclusions**

What can be seen from the above analysis is that, in theory at least, the criterion parts of the Model can be applied to higher education whilst leaving some questions which need to be addressed particularly in the areas of leadership, autonomy of academic staff and views on who the customers of higher education are. These are issues to which I will return in the chapter nine. However, suffice to say that, for the moment, I can see that the Model could be applied to higher education in the same or similar way as it is to other parts of the public sector. The question left outstanding is whether the issues of leadership, the perspectives of academic staff and the notion of customers are sufficiently irreconcilable that they render the Model inapplicable.

So, in the first instance, what I wish to do next is to use one of the self-assessment methods suggested by the BQF and EFQM as an effective means of gathering data in relation to the Model and its criterion parts. In this case, the method used is that of the workshop as described in chapter two, section 2.7 and that is what chapter six is about.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Research outcomes: applicability of the Excellence Model to higher education through participant observation**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will report on the outcomes of my data collection and analysis processes as described in chapter four, sections 4.6.2 and 4.7.2. In that chapter I identified three separate data collection and analysis processes in relation to this research method of testing the applicability of the Model to higher education through participant observation. They were:

1. Undertaking a self-assessment of 'Clock' by gathering data against the Model criteria using a method commonly used with the Model, that is, workshop, to assess the extent to which the Model and its criterion parts could be used in higher education.
2. Collecting views from members of the Task Force involved in the self-assessment process about both the process and the utility of the Model for higher education to identify and assess the views of those who had been involved.
3. Involving the members of the Task Force to test out their views on the applicability of the Model to higher education given potential implementation issues to identify what issues might help and or hinder the implementation of such an approach to quality.

This chapter will, therefore, focus on outcomes from each of the research approaches, described above.

#### **6.2 Gathering data against the Model criteria using a method commonly used with the Model**

I used 'Clock' College as a case study and undertook a self-assessment of the College's activities in relation to the EFQM Excellence Model employing one of the most comprehensive approaches to self-assessment, that is, a workshop approach as described in chapter two, section 2.6 and chapter four, section 4.6.2. This meant that I got together a number of staff members as described in chapter four and worked as a member of this group (Task Force) to gather data from inside the College in relation to the criterion parts of the Model. As a result of the data collection processes described in chapter four, section 4.6.2.1 the Task Force members produced an agreed list of strengths and areas for improvement with suggested action points for each criterion and sub-criterion part of the Model as a result of the data gathering. These are to be found at appendix 05.

The consensus process described in chapter four, section 4.6.2.1 was interesting in that people brought to the table different and sometimes varying perspectives on the institution. However, these added to the assessment and so it was not one of a single person's take on the institution but one based on a range of data and points of view. Given these different assessments it was encouraging to see the way in which, through this process, a consensual position could be reached, making it feel more robust. As will be seen from section 6.3 the members of the Task Force liked the consensus process in that it allowed different perspectives on the institution to be considered in making their assessments. Additionally, it provided them with a better understanding of the work of the organisation in that they viewed the assessment criteria using the Model as comprehensive and thorough.

The output from both the data gathering and consensus processes demonstrated that data could be collected in relation to each of the criterion parts of the Model, not just through a piece of desk research as had been shown and discussed in chapter five, but also by staff members asking specific questions of appropriately identified staff to gather this data and by agreeing on what that data seemed to say about the organisation.

As indicated in chapter four, section 4.7.2.1 the Task Force members did not decide at the outset whether to score the College or not as they did not want to skew the process by creating this as a focus. Rather, they decided that, having gathered the data, it might be interesting to see where that placed the College in the EFQM scoring scheme. As far as the scoring process was concerned it generated the results listed in Table 13. These scores are produced using a scoring template produced by the British Quality Foundation as can be seen from appendix 02. An explanation of the philosophy underpinning the approach to scoring can be found in chapter two, section 2.2.



Criterion	Approach	Deployment	Assess and Review	Total
<b>1a</b>	35	20	15	25
b	20	10	0	10
c	25	75	5	35
d	40	65	15	40
<b>2a</b>	55	75	30	55
b	40	75	30	47
c	30	75	25	43
d	50	60	40	50
e	40	75	0	38
<b>3a</b>	40	70	10	40
b	45	50	10	35
c	20	20	0	20
d	10	50	10	25
e	10	50	10	30
<b>4a</b>	25	25	5	20
b	50	75	10	45
c	50	75	10	50
d	25	70	0	30
e	20	15	0	10
<b>5a</b>	20	15	0	10
b	10	10	0	10
c	35	20	25	25
d	40	80	15	45
e	60	75	25	55
	<b>Results</b>	<b>Scope</b>		
<b>6a</b>	0	25		13
b	0	10		5
<b>7a</b>	0	10		5
b	10	25		18
<b>8a</b>	10	10		10
b	0	0		0
<b>9a</b>	25	25		25
b	0	0		0

**Table 13: EFQM Excellence scores for 'Clock'**  
**Source: Research**

Both the data collection and the scoring exercises generated some interesting points to note for 'Clock':

1. That there were pockets of good practice but often these were not fully deployed. Interestingly an outcome of the College's Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) was that of the need to find way of sharing good practice and this outcome from the self-assessment could be seen as a manifestation of that.
2. Where 'Clock' lost points in the scoring process was as a result of having few systematic approaches in place. That is not to say that there were no approaches in relation to the criteria being assessed, rather, they appeared quite ad hoc and seemed often to have little rationale to their inception or continuation. The question 'why' was often on our minds. This accords with one of the outcomes of the Liverpool John Moores (2003) self-assessment against the Model criteria where they came to the conclusion that they could save a substantial sum of money by removing a number of processes which seemed redundant in that they were no longer making any contribution to the smooth running of the function but had, over time, continued in use.
3. One particular outcome of the assessment is interesting in that it also arose through the College's ELIR a year later. The point I am referring to here is that of the need to review the College's structure which, to those engaged in this self-assessment, appeared inappropriate in the way in which it did not seem to support the policy and strategy of the organisation. A year later the College's ELIR was critical of the strategic management of the College and a re-structuring of the senior management team took place as a result.
4. Approaches seemed to be reviewed seldom for their effectiveness. There did seem to be a degree of complacency and defensiveness around this kind of activity whereby staff seemed to see such a process to review for effectiveness as indicative of criticism rather than of the need to ensure that, if things could be done better, a more effective way needed to be found.
5. 'Clock' has few results as defined by the Model. These are in the areas of customers, people (employees), society and key performance. The Model RADAR scoring criteria (as described in chapter two, section 2.2) requires organisations to have trends that show positive performance, the inclusion of targets and the availability of comparisons with external organisations. Additionally, a scope of results is expected in terms of results addressing relevant areas. Few of these were in evidence in 'Clock'.

6. There is no overarching process management system within the College that enables different aspects of the organisation to consider how the various 'bits' fit together.
7. There is no overall strategy or framework to drive continuous improvement. However, since Clock's Enhancement-led Institutional Review it has been attempting to create more of a culture of quality enhancement. This is, however, for the academic areas only.

In total 'Clock' scored 221 points out of a possible total of 1000. Whilst this might not seem like a lot the consultant who, as I said previously, had vast experience in this area, felt that this was not an unusual assessment for an organisation setting out on such a self-assessment journey.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion to be reached from this aspect of this research method was that the Model criteria and its scoring mechanism could generate output and identify both strategic and operational issues for improvement.

### **6.3 Collecting views from members of the Task Force involved in the self-assessment process about both the process and the utility of the Model for higher education**

The exercise of gathering and assessing and scoring data in relation to the criterion parts of the Model was not the only aspect of this piece of research. I wanted particularly to get feedback from the members of the Task Force about the process in which they had been engaged and so I interviewed each of them to seek their views. I will, therefore, in this section describe the outcomes of gathering views of the members of the Task Force involved in the self-assessment exercise described in section 6.2 above. These views were elicited through interviews using a pre-prepared schedule as described in chapter four, section 4.6.6.2 on data collection and involved seven members of the Task Force.

Prior to undertaking this exercise no member of the Task Force knew much about the EFQM Excellence Model with the exception of myself and the project co-ordinator who taught quality management and had extensive theoretical and practical knowledge. None of the others knew much if anything about the Model, although one person knew a little from talking

to others outside 'Clock' and one or two had gone on-line prior to the training session to familiarise themselves. One member of the group had experience of ISO9000. Given this level of knowledge I was interested to know what the members had felt about the process of self-assessment and of the utility of the Model as an approach to institutional quality.

All of the Task Force members saw value both to themselves and also to the organisation in the 'exercise', that is the process of self-assessment and scoring the organisation using the Model criteria and approaches. They mentioned benefits like looking at new ways of doing things, meeting other people in the College, gaining an understanding of a tool that could be used and an opportunity to look critically at the approaches within the College. In terms of value to the institution all of the Task Force members identified the fact that the institution could learn a lot about itself through this process as the main benefit. One member felt that there were advantages in such a co-ordinated approach to an assessment of the organisation as a whole in that this happened seldom in the way in which the organisation was structured and managed its work.

As described in chapter four on research methodology the members of the Task Force were provided with a two-day training on the Excellence Model and preparation for the self-assessment and data gathering process. This was, therefore, an important part of the exercise in ensuring that those who were going to be conducting the data gathering knew what they were about. All members of the Task Force felt the initial two-day training on the Model was beneficial. It was felt that the process was good in that the training sessions allowed them to learn about the structure of the Model and its implementation – that is, the usefulness of putting something into practice and not just understanding it theoretically. However, all members felt, too, that they could have done with more help in preparing for the actual process of data gathering. All of the members felt that splitting the Task Force into groups of three was the right one to take allowing the group members to support one another. However, there was a general view that more preparation would have assisted them in this process. Additionally, one member of the group commented on the nature of the group – that there was a cross section of College staff facilitating a perspective on most College processes which was seen as helpful. One group member felt that it would have been helpful to have had the training off campus so that there were no distractions. This is a reflection of the issue of time and one to which I will return later in this section.

Each team had managed itself differently, an approach which might change if we put more thought and effort into the preparation phase of such a self-assessment process. These members who had responsibility for looking at and gathering evidence for the results areas

found it more difficult to be clear about appropriate questions to enable them to gather evidence in relation to the criteria. A particular area of difficulty found was that of gathering data for the results aspects of the Model where one is looking for particular trend data rather than someone's description of an approach. This had required a different approach to questioning and those undertaking assessment of the result areas found this a difficulty. This may have been because of the approach which they adopted; equally, it could have been because there were no results to find.

Whilst there was some concern expressed about the lack of preparation for the gathering of data and the kinds of questions to ask, the members of the Task Force also felt that, given the consensus process, this perceived lack of preparation had probably not affected the outcomes in terms of identification of strengths and areas for improvement in that an additional opportunity for input in terms of data collection had been available through the consensus meeting.

All members felt that the team approach to gathering data for the self-assessment exercise was a good one. However, it was also felt that a bigger team of people would also have been preferable as all the members felt the pressures of undertaking the exercise in a relatively short period of time. It was felt too that the Task Force needed to consist of staff from a range of functions and levels and that we had managed to achieve this with ours although one member of the Group did express the view that it would have been helpful to have had more support staff involved as two of the staff who were support staff on the Task Force had also taught and so he felt there was perhaps an imbalance.

The Task Force members all enjoyed the consensus process and hearing the evidence brought back and the different points of view expressed. One member did comment that there was a need for a strong chair to manage such a process to reach a point of consensus. However, the discursive process was seen as highly beneficial to an understanding of the organisation. One member mentioned specifically that he had valued the range of perspectives that were brought to the consensus meeting not just from the interviews that members of the Task Force had conducted but also from the members of the Task Force themselves. Generally, the team members felt that it had been relatively easy to develop consensus given this opportunity of discussion and debate and the opportunity to hear the different perspectives presented as described above.

As described in chapter four on methodology I had decided to use a consultant to facilitate the training to enable me to take more of a participant observer role. All the team members

commented positively on the input provided by the consultant to the point that they felt we would not have had such a positive outcome without this professional input. Their view was that he was extremely knowledgeable about the Model and that his experience in the field had assisted their understanding. One member of the Task Force felt that we could have used the consultant to more effect. What he had in mind here was preparation for the data gathering part of the exercise.

As described in chapter two scoring an organisation is an optional part of the Model. During the consensus process a decision had been taken to score the data gathered. It is not necessary to do this but provides an opportunity to benchmark against other organisations. One member of the Task Force commented: "you can see where you are with the scoring. It provides a concrete manifestation of the evidence gathered in relation to the Model". Two members of the Task Force did comment on having some difficulty with the scoring mechanism and process but felt that that at the end of the day the scores achieved were probably a reasonable reflection of the College. However, everyone was glad that we had taken this step as it provides a tangible impression of the state of development of the College. One member of staff commented that the relatively low score achieved could operate as a demotivational factor, although he recognised too that for some people the opposite would be the case.

An aspect of the process which they all reported enjoying was working with the other Task Force members which provided them both with support in their search for data but also an opportunity to find out about different aspects of the organisation with which they were perhaps not particularly familiar as well as an opportunity to hear different perceptions of the institution from different standpoints and so a chance to review their knowledge and understanding. A view expressed was "we have common issues and problems but we don't integrate or mix enough to appreciate that – we could learn from one another". This lack of integration was also an outcome from the interviews undertaken in nine higher education institutions as will be seen from chapter eight.

All members were asked if they would like to see the Model implemented in 'Clock'. All responded in the affirmative. That is not to suggest that they did not see difficulties in doing so – they did – but rather to suggest that they saw benefits in using a framework like this generic model to consider organisational quality. For another it was seen as a way of pulling functions and aspects of the College together; three members mentioned how they had appreciated having an analytical tool, which they could use to review and evaluate some of the College processes, that is a framework within which this could take place. This need to

review for effectiveness was seen as a positive outcome of the process in that it had helped them to see the need for this kind of thinking and approach to processes and systems in place whilst providing them with a tool to enable them do that. It was recognised that there were quality assurance processes in place and a range of development initiatives in 'Clock' but that the EFQM Excellence Model provided an emphasis on the need to review approaches for effectiveness, something that was not always done. It was felt that an understanding of the Model would make departments think about what they were doing to enhance quality and how to work with others.

The main difficulty that the members of the Task Force could envisage in attempting to implement the use of the Model was that of sufficient time and staffing as well as getting people on board in the first place. All members experienced time pressures in getting to meet staff and gather the evidence. They had found the exercise a time-consuming one and recognised that if the College were to continue with this approach that time would need to be found to enable it to happen effectively. In terms of potential implementation all members were clear that staff would want an answer to the 'what's in it for me' and 'why do we need another initiative' questions. One member in particular highlighted the need for commitment from senior management to ensure successful implementation. The Principal who was a member of the group identified an issue about moving from a compliance culture with external assessment and audit to one of internal continuous improvement. This is an issue to which I will return in chapter eight when I look at the outcomes from the interviews.

All members of the Task Force reported enjoying the process in finding out about new things, that is, new approaches to quality, about the opportunity to look at the College in a more holistic way and from different points of view and the opportunity to meet with others and thereby gain a better understanding of how the organisation operated as a whole.

The main aspect of the 'exercise' which the members of the Task Force did not like was not having enough time as the process was seen as a time-consuming one. Although it should be noted that there were two people for whom there was nothing that they disliked.

I asked all the members if they thought the staff in 'Clock' might embrace the Model. Most felt that there would be issues in trying to get staff to see the benefits. Additionally, I asked them what the issue for staff might be in implementing the Model both in 'Clock' specifically and in higher education in general. The issues which they thought would get in the way of an acceptance of this approach to quality were own agendas, pressure of work, the use of the Model being seen as yet another initiative, that it wouldn't make any difference, resistance to

change and the fact that the senior management were seen as blinkered in not being able to see the benefits and its utility would not be appreciated. Additionally, they identified the attitudes of academic staff in that they were resistant to change, a general culture of resistance, a lack of time which was probably seen as the biggest deterrent and making the necessary arrangements to get people to work together.

A positive view expressed was that feedback from grassroots staff could help senior management identify where improvements could be made. This had happened through the self-assessment process itself as can be seen from appendix 05 where a number of areas for improvement have been identified. This suggestion that feedback from staff could assist the institution was made in a spirit of co-operation and a recognition that different contributions could be made by different people to the whole in terms of identification of where there was room for improvement. The Model itself was seen as a tool for identifying aspects of our existing quality systems where we are weak and that the Model could then help in identify areas for improvement. A member of the Task Force, in a senior management position within the College, saw the benefit of looking at the Model in relation to other quality models and to make an assessment of the usefulness of the EFQM Excellence Model in relation to institutional quality and how to move forward as an institution.

Of those interviewed, all said that they would volunteer again with the exception of one who felt that time pressures were too great. Those who would volunteer again would do so because they recognised the usefulness of the Model and its approaches to self-assessment and quality enhancement. All felt that they had a much better understanding of the Model.

## **Conclusion**

This group of people who had no prior knowledge of the Model liked its holistic approach to quality, the way in which it brought aspects of the organisation together and the way in which it was analytical and rigorous. However, at the same time they saw some possible deterrents in being able to implement the Model in 'Clock. So, they were able to identify things that would facilitate the use of the Model and reasons why implementation might be difficult. These were:



### **Drivers for the use of the Model:**

- Commitment from the Principal. The Principal had willingly taken part in the exercise of training and self-assessment and was clearly interested in the use of what was perceived as a holistic model;
- The fact that the Model was seen as comprehensive by the members of the Task Force. This was evidenced partly through the analysis of the existing action plan in comparison with that produced from the self-assessment demonstrating a more thorough assessment of the organisation;
- The way in which the members of the Task Force felt that had been enabled to understand more about the organisation as whole which helped them in turn to understand the contribution that their 'bit' made to that whole;
- The Model was seen as an analytical tool that could assist the institution in being proactive in identifying where there was room for improvement

### **Restraining factors for the use of the Model:**

- Time pressures. The members of the Task Force had found the exercise time consuming and recognised that if the Model were to be adopted and used in 'Clock' then staff would need to be given the time to discharge their responsibilities. Additionally, it was recognised that as a relatively small institution, that there was little slack in the system to provide people with extra time;
- Own agendas. Interestingly, it was two members of academic staff who made most of this issue. Their view was that academic staff had their own agendas rather than the interests of the organisation at heart. As such, it might be difficult to get those staff on board given this kind of mindset;
- Resistance to change. This was identified as a general theme. It was felt to be an integral part of the organisation's way of going about things;
- 'Not another initiative'. There was recognition that the use of the Model could be seen in this light. To some extent this was a reflection of 'Clock' being subject to a

number of external requirements from the Funding Council and the Quality Assurance Agency;

- A lack of working together. An important outcome of the exercise was that the staff involved found it useful to find out more about other aspects of the College in that they felt that there were few opportunities to do so and that this lack of joined-up functioning might get in the way of any activity that required them to do so.

#### **6.4 Involving the members of the Task Force to test out their views on the applicability of the Model to higher education given potential implementation issues**

I plan in this section to describe the outcomes of interviewing the members of the Task Force as a group to seek their views on implementation and to see if these were any different those expressed through the individual interviews, the outcomes of which are described in section 6.3 and thereby attempt to get a consensual view if that were possible.

All of the Task Force members wanted to implement and use the Model in 'Clock' and felt that it would have very positive benefits. It was also their view that, as people gained more experience of using the Model, it would increasingly become a more useful tool and was seen as a useful discipline for evaluating that which went on in the College. However, they could also see difficulties in implementing the Model in higher education generally. Some reservations expressed were about resources (human and financial) and commitment. Implementing any change process was seen as demanding and implementing the EFQM Excellence Model was no different. So, there was a big question mark around getting staff on board and how to get staff enthused. Providing staff involved with dedicated time was seen as essential to its success. Another factor was that of planning. It was felt necessary to its success that such implementation was completely thought through. To achieve a successful implementation there was an identified need for management commitment and some standard bearers who would take the messages out to the staff.

Another difficulty expressed was that of the relatedness of an action plan coming from the self-assessment exercise to others, which might already be in the system. So, how does one integrate the outcomes of self-assessment with other quality improvement exercises? However, it was also acknowledged that this must be a general issue for any organisation starting to implement the EFQM Excellence Model in that no organisation starts with a clean sheet. This was an aspect of the research exercise that we picked up and which is reported

in section 6.5. One turn-off for one team member was that of creating yet another action plan when we already had a number in place.

The general view was that the concepts of quality expressed in the EFQM Excellence Model would not of themselves create difficulties in the College. The issue would be how staff might react to what might be seen as yet another initiative or to another change or form of evaluation. To this end the view was that it would need to be very carefully explained to engage people particularly those who might have their own agendas and be quite happy to see such a development fail. People needed to be helped to see the value in it.

The main difficulties in implementing the Model were seen as this being perceived as an additional task when staff were already feeling under pressure. Commitment from senior management was seen as essential to sell the idea and to continue with it in the face of adversity and over the longer term. This commitment was to both the underlying philosophy of the Model and to the undertaking of a self-assessment process for internal use leading to quality improvements.

The view expressed by the Task Force members was that ultimately, 'there's no difference between HE and commercial organisations in that, if you wish to be an excellent organisation, you need think about what you are doing and seek to improve on those areas where there is room for improvement and to build on the recognised strengths'. In my conclusions chapter, nine, I will consider whether there are other issues to be considered in the implementation and use of the Model which may be of greater or equal importance.

All felt that it was acceptable to regard students as customers in that they too want to 'purchase' something that is worthwhile. (The issue of students as customers is one to which I will return in my conclusions chapter nine). A point to be considered there is the extent to which students are made to feel customers by the institution rather than a real similarity with commercial customers.

Although a number of strengths, areas for improvement and subsequent action points had been agreed and listed, at the same time the Task Force members recognised that there were already a number of action plans around the College and we wondered to what extent we would be replicating other action plans already in existence for other purposes. This led the members of the Task Force to look at those other action plans to consider the degree of overlap. Part of the discussion within the Task Force was why we might want to create yet another action plan when we had so many in the College already. So, to assess if an action



Given the issues aired about difficulties in implementation we agreed that it would be useful to identify and quantify these as a way of determining the feasibility of implementation. As such, the Task Force met to discuss how to take forward the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in the College. So, the first question was what did we mean by “implementation”? Implementation in this context was defined as the appointment of a team that would:

- facilitate the development of the use of the EFQM Excellence Model internally;
- have responsibility for ensuring that the actions on the action plan were worked through appropriately;
- ensure that the driving and restraining factors would be managed (Lewin, 1951) (See below for a description of Lewin’s approach to managing a change programme);
- Undertake a self-assessment against the EFQM Excellence Model criteria.

We used Lewin’s (1951) Force Field Analysis approach to planning and implementing a change management programme. Force Field Analysis is a management technique for diagnosing situations and is useful when looking at the variables involved in planning and implementing a change programme. It assumes that in any situation there are both driving and restraining forces that influence any change that may occur. Driving factors are seen as those forces affecting a situation that are pushing in a particular direction in that they tend to initiate a change and keep it going; restraining factors are forces acting to inhibit or decrease the driving forces e.g. apathy and hostility.

Lewin’s (ibid) own position was that it is better to reduce the restraining forces (lowers the temperature) than to increase the driving factors (raises the temperature), but that the change agent’s control is usually much greater over the driving ones resulting in a serious dilemma in the strategy. In this case the change agent was likely to be the Principal given his involvement in the self-assessment process. However, given his proclivity to operate through the senior management team to obtain commitment to the idea, that responsibility probably fell to a group of people rather than one individual. I refer in my conclusions section at the end of this chapter to the outcomes of taking this issue of implementing the use of the Model for self-assessment purposes to the senior management team.

The Task Force identified the following driving and restraining factors to the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model to ‘Clock’ College.

The ‘driving’ factors are listed below:

## Driving

- That the EFQM Excellence Model provides a holistic approach to quality
- The need for a drive on increasing student numbers
- The drive for value for money
- The desire for people to feel job satisfaction
- The recognition for the need for improvement
- The need to take the College forward in its strategic thinking
- A desire to improve the student experience
- Opportunities on the XXXX Campus for development
- The point in time of the College's development
- External quality expectations from the Funding Council and the QAA
- Strong commitment from senior management

The following 'restraining' factors were identified:

## Restraining

- Resistance to change
- Resources
- Workloads
- Seen as a duplication of effort
- The perception of staff of yet another initiative
- Immediate priorities and the fact that the EFQM Excellence Model would not be seen as being able to help with these
- Motivations – that is, own agendas
- Lack of understanding
- Getting the right team

Lewin (ibid) postulates that equilibrium (that is, the potential for implementing a change) is reached when the sum of the driving forces equal the sum of the restraining forces. This requires the application of a weighting to each of these factors. There is a contrary view which contests that disequilibrium can be used as a provoker of change (Becher, 1992). I think in this case the Group felt that there were sufficient driving factors to facilitate change.

The weighting was done on a scale of one to five with one weak and five strong. It should be noted that this scale was arbitrary and one that the Group invented for its own use. The factors applied in this case can be seen below:

## **Driving**

- That the EFQM Excellence Model provides a holistic approach to quality (4)
- The need for a drive on increasing student numbers (5)
- The drive for value for money (4)
- The desire for people to feel job satisfaction (4)
- The recognition for the need for improvement (3)
- The need to take the College forward in its strategic thinking (5)
- A desire to improve the student experience (5)
- Opportunities on the Dumfries Campus for development (3)
- The point in time of the College's development (3)
- External quality expectations from the Funding Council and the QAA (4)
- Strong commitment from the Principal (5)

**Total driving factors score = 45**

## **Restraining**

- Resistance to change (5)
- Resources (2)\*
- Workloads (3)\*
- Seen as a duplication of effort (4)
- The perception of staff of yet another initiative (5)
- Immediate priorities and the fact that the EFQM Excellence Model would not be seen as being able to help with these (3)
- Motivations – that is, own agendas (5)
- Lack of understanding (5)\*
- Getting the right team (5)\*

**Total restraining factors score = 37**

Force Field Analysis of this kind enables one to strengthen the forces supporting a change initiative and reduce the impact of the opposing ones. As a result of the above analysis the

Task Force looked at the opposing factors as described above and in particular those marked \* as those factors which could be most easily influenced through senior management support and decided that ways of maintaining these to create more helping factors were to:

- Get the right team together that could promote the EFQM Excellence Model and how it might be useful for individuals;
- Promote the use of the EFQM Excellence Model throughout the College using different means like:
  - College internal newsletter
  - A forum
  - A research seminar
  - Communicate – spend time talking to people about how the principles and approaches of the EFQM Excellence Model could help them;
- Apply resources to the project;
- Ensure that staff involved in the 'team' had time to enable them to undertake the tasks.

At the same time it was recognised that the difficult issues to manage were attitudinal ones and that these too were likely to have a driving or restraining influence.

As a result of the above analysis it was decided that myself and the Project Co-ordinator as representatives of the Task Force would present the findings to the Planning and Resources Committee (the senior management committee) of the College with a view to persuading them of the benefits of adopting the EFQM Excellence Model for the College. What we experienced was a high degree of questioning about both the process and the outcomes which was useful, healthy and to be expected. However, what we also encountered were high levels of defensiveness and a lack of preparedness to consider some of the assessments that had been made. As a result it was decided that now was not the best time to make any further use of the Model.



## **Conclusion**

It was the conclusion of the Task Force members that there were a number of driving and restraining issues in looking to implement the Model in 'Cock'. However, it was also interesting to note that the driving ones, if activated, outnumber (when weighted) the restraining factors. These factors identified correlated with those identified in section 6.3 which is not surprising in that they came from the same group of people. However, it is interesting to note the consistency in the identification of these factors as the Task Force was made up of individual members of staff from different parts of the organisation and yet they had a common view of the issues as can be seen from section 6.4 where they came together to review these matters.

### **6.5 Chapter conclusions**

The main conclusions from this research method was that it was possible to use the Model to undertake a self-assessment of the organisation. Additionally, it was possible to reach a consensual view of the organisation's strengths and areas for improvement. Equally, the Task Force was able to produce an action plan which was demonstrably more comprehensive than any other action plan produced within the organisation suggesting a more holistic approach to quality. These outcomes accord with the conclusions reached from my desk research as described in chapter five.

The members of the Task Force, drawn from a range of functions within the organisation, all felt too that the exercise had been a useful and productive one. The comment which struck me most was the way in which those staff involved in collecting the data had viewed the process as a useful one in understanding better the range of functions within the organisation. So, the self-assessment had generated a more joined-up approach to its thinking and understanding. All members of the Task Force felt that there was something to offer in the use of the Model in higher education. This was not a wholesale acceptance as some members could see some of the difficulties in yet another initiative being 'imposed' on the staff of the College.

However, the members of the Task Force could also see issues that would get in the way of implementation. These included:

- Staff (particularly academic staff) operating to their own agendas rather to that of the organisation;

- the need for time and other resources to oversee the implementation of the Model effectively;
- resistance to change;
- a compliance rather than a quality improvement culture;
- a lack of functions working together

The driving and restraining factors were a useful indicator of what the issues for implementation might be in this institution and possible for the higher education sector generally. This is an issue to which I will return in chapter nine.

As a follow-on to the self-assessment process I took the outcomes to the senior management group of the college where the approach received a lukewarm response largely because the College was about to have a QAA audit and this felt like an additional task to take on. Also, I experienced a degree of compliance – that is, if it weren't needed by someone outside the organisation, then why would we be doing it? In these circumstances I found it difficult to find the arguments to persuade the senior management team that this was something that we should take on because it had something to offer us as an institution in the way in which we went about things.

So, in conclusion it would seem that at least theoretically, the Model did seem to apply to higher education. However, as I said in section 4.8 of chapter four I did feel that as a result of the process and outcomes of the two research methods employed and described in chapters five and six that culture of higher education institutions had to be a factor to take into account and as such chapters seven and eight describe the outcomes of the two additional research methods used to assess the applicability of the Model.

## Chapter 7

### Research outcomes: applicability of the Excellence Model to higher education by analysing the culture of higher education through the printed materials of twenty HEIs

#### 7.1 Introduction

As described in chapter four on methodology I analysed the available printed materials of twenty higher education institutions constituting a sample across the sector to consider and identify the specific aspects of higher education culture (if such a thing exists) and how that might help or hinder the applicability of the Excellence Model.

From my analysis of the twenty sets of printed materials I identified the following common themes as represented in Table 14 below.

Theme / HEI	Innovative approaches to teaching and learning	Student-centred	Student support	Teaching quality assessments	Research assessment exercise	Size	Enhance skills/employability	Widening access	History	Friendliness	Leadership/management	Culture	Excellence/quality references	Reputation and status	Total
A	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√					√	9
B	√		√	√	√	√		√	√				√	√	9
C				√	√	√			√			√	√	√	7
D			√	√			√		√	√		√		√	8
E	√		√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	11
F	√	√	√	√			√	√					√	√	8
G	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	12
H				√	√	√			√	√			√	√	7
I			√	√	√			√	√				√	√	7
J	√	√			√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	10
K	√	√	√				√	√			√	√		√	7
L	√		√	√			√	√		√	√			√	8
M	√		√			√	√	√	√			√	√	√	9
N			√	√	√	√			√	√		√	√	√	9
O	√			√	√		√		√				√	√	7
P	√						√			√		√	√	√	6
Q	√			√	√	√	√	√			√		√	√	9
R	√	√	√		√		√	√						√	7
S	√			√	√	√			√	√			√	√	8
T	√						√							√	3
Total	15	4	12	14	12	9	14	13	13	8	4	9	14	20	161

**Table 14: Outcomes of analysis of printed materials of twenty HEIs institutions**

**Source: Research**

In terms of the type of institution this represents the following make-up:

“old” university:

8

“new” university:	8
1960s university	2
Other:	2

**Total 20**

So, Table 15 below shows this make-up of the sample using the same themes, where D to T are ‘new’ universities, A to S ‘old’ universities, E and M ‘other’ higher education institutions and O and P 1960s universities:

Theme / HEI	Innovative approaches to teaching and learning	Student-centred	Student support	Teaching quality assessments	Research assessment exercise	Size	Enhance skills/employability	Widening access	History	Friendliness	Leadership	Culture	Excellence/quality references	Reputation and status	Total
D			√	√			√	√	√	√		√		√	8
F	√	√	√	√			√	√					√	√	8
J	√	√			√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	10
K	√	√	√				√	√				√		√	7
L	√		√	√			√	√		√	√			√	8
R	√	√	√		√		√	√						√	7
T	√						√							√	3
A	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√					√	9
B	√		√	√	√	√		√	√				√	√	9
C				√	√	√			√			√	√	√	7
G	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	12
H				√	√	√			√	√			√	√	7
N			√	√	√	√			√	√		√	√	√	9
I			√	√	√			√	√				√	√	7
Q	√			√	√	√	√	√			√		√	√	9
S	√			√	√	√			√	√			√	√	8
E	√		√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	11
M	√		√			√	√	√	√			√	√	√	9
O	√			√	√		√		√				√	√	7
P	√						√			√		√	√	√	6
Total	15	4	12	14	12	9	14	13	13	8	4	9	14	20	161

**Table 15: Outcomes of analysis of printed materials of twenty HEIs institutions by type of institution**

**Source: Desk research**

The above themes require some explanation in terms of how they were described and viewed by the HEIs. In each of the following themes I have included some quotes from each of the institutions included in that theme:

## 7.2 Innovative approaches to teaching and learning

Fifteen out of the twenty institutions mentioned innovative approaches to teaching and learning in some form. In undertaking an analysis of the transcripts I looked for:

- the use of words like innovative, new and developmental;
- approaches that appeared unusual and original rather than run of the mill;
- qualities in this area the HEIs themselves thought made them distinctive

This resulted in the following:

“At the cutting edge: research is vital to the University, keeping staff at the cutting edge of knowledge and students constantly informed of new developments. Our record is impressive”. (HEI A, 2004 Prospectus, page 4);

and

“Today, more than 2000 academic staff, many with international reputations in their own subjects, continue to provide the highest standards of teaching in almost every academic area, and more than 20,000 students continue to benefit from it”. (HEI B, 2004 Prospectus, page 7);

and

“We are sure that our learning environment will ensure that you have a rewarding, stimulating and enjoyable time with us. At XXX we offer courses in a wide range of subjects with qualifications at degree, postgraduate and professional level”. (HEI E, Website);

and

“To achieve this XXXX University's aims are to promote:

- challenging and innovative teaching and learning which empowers the active learner” (HEI F, Website);

and

“At XXXX academics across all areas of study are at the cutting edge of research and scholarship which informs and drives our teaching for the benefit of students. XXXX is one of the UK's favourite universities and last year received over 50,000

applications. XXXX offers an exceptionally wide choice of degrees and we are justifiably proud of the quality of our courses". (HEI G, 2004 Prospectus, page 5).

and

"The primary aim of our collective endeavours is the development of people. Through our teaching and their learning we aim to produce people who have knowledge and understanding and the ability to apply it and who are equipped with the necessary skills, attitudes and confidence to play a constructive and creative role in society throughout their lives". (HEI J, University Teaching and Learning Strategy);

and

"To enable teaching staff and learning advisers to organise learning environments that will enable students from diverse backgrounds and with different levels of ability to engage deeply with the curriculum and become highly motivated, self-directed learners" (HEI K, Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005);

and

"My ambition for you is that your intellect is challenged, your sense of awe refined and that when you leave us you have a passion for learning and critical thought. You have much to give and many attributes to develop that will contribute to our collective well-being. I know you will find XXXX a place where you can grow – I look forward to meeting you" (HEI M, Principal, Website);

and

"..... XXXX is famous for its innovative approach to education. We offer degree courses which give you breadth in your studies. You have a choice of over 700 degree courses..... Some combinations you won't find anywhere else.....". (HEI P, Prospectus 2003);

and

"It has a strong reputation for innovation and success in teaching and learning including.....developing innovative and relevant programmes at all levels and modes of attendance across a wide range of subject areas". (HEI Q, Vision and Strategy to 2010);

and

“XXXX is an exciting, diverse learning community. We aim to give our students an enthusiasm for new ideas, new knowledge and new learning and the opportunities to excel in their chosen careers”. (HEI R Website, 5 March 2005);

So, innovation in teaching and learning means different things to different HEIs. In some instances it is about the range and structure of provision and in others about their approaches to teaching and learning. It became apparent through my analysis that the “new” universities and the higher education colleges were more likely to talk about innovation in relation to the development of thinking and learning facilitation as can be seen from the above quotations from HEIs F, J, K, M and R. The more traditional universities were more inclined to describe innovation in relation to course structure as can be seen from HEIs G and Q and also to relate it to the quality of teaching as a result of research activity – that is, we are innovative because we are able to offer such-and-such a course designed in such-and-such a way and because we have lots of research active staff which, of course, means that the teaching will be up-to-date and more effective as a result. This can be seen from the quote from HEIs A, B and G.

There was not much evidence of innovation in relation to teaching methods as such.

### **7.3 Student-centred**

Four out of the twenty institutions mentioned their student-centred approach. In analysing the extracts I looked for words like ‘student-centred’ or ‘student-focussed’. I decided also not to include references in this section to student support as I saw that concept and approach to students as being different with the former focus on the student and so creating a kind of customer-oriented culture:

“The University’s mission is to be a leading, broad based university, serving national, regional and international needs and characterised by..... the development of the full human potential of students”. (HEI F, Prospectus, page 276);

and

“The development of a learner-centred culture is pivotal to the strategy”. (HEI J, University Teaching and Learning Strategy);

and

“The university is “student-centred” and will support a student learning experience which begins on initial contact and continues through life”. (HEI K, Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005);

and

“We have always aimed to give our students an enthusiasm for new ideas, new knowledge and new learning so that they graduate feeling their future life will be much richer in every sense of the word. And staff are specially focused on their students – there’s a really tangible feeling of mutual support here”. (HEI R, Website, 9 March 2003).

Given the issue of students as customers to which I will return to in chapter nine this is the theme that appears to most differentiate HEIs. All four institutions that provided evidence of a student-centred or student-focussed approach to students were “new” universities. Of these four describing a student-centred approach to students one was visited – HEI F from which visit I did get the impression that they put a lot of thought and energy into how they can best serve the needs of their students.

#### **7.4 Student support**

Twelve out of the twenty institutions identified that they offered students a degree of support in some way or other:

“You will have a tutor – one of the lecturers in your department – who you will meet on a regular basis. If you feel you have a problem on your course, or need help or information on either academic or personal matters, your tutor is there to offer advice and support. The Centre for Lifelong Learning can also provide help and advice on study skills”. (HEI A, 2003 Prospectus, page 21);

and

“I returned to university to improve my chances of getting a better job. This course also gave me so many other skills that some people take for granted like word processing, peripheral learning, research, lateral thinking and discussion skills. Studying at the



University also prepares you for the outside world. As a mature student I didn't feel as though I was on my own. There was plenty of support, especially when it came to my dyslexia. I felt as though my self-esteem was given a boost and I was able to take the step further to overcome it". (HEI D, Prospectus, student case study, page 135)

and

"Help you fulfil your highest potential through excellent teaching, guidance and support". (HEI E, Prospectus, Principal introduction);

and

"At XXXX students can expect to be treated with respect, courtesy and sympathy. The University has shown itself to be very successful in supporting students through their studies, with advice and material help where necessary. Support staff at XXXX are there to ensure that students feel secure and confident, enough to stay the course and qualify with a head start for their future". (HEI F, 2003 Prospectus, page 5);

and

"The University of XXXX has everything you need: excellent academic credentials; an unrivalled student experience and the support network to make your time at XXXX rewarding and unforgettable". (HEI G, Prospectus, page 7);

and

"A particular feature of our support for undergraduate students is the Personal Adviser system. Each student is assigned to a member of staff in their department who will normally remain their Personal Adviser during their time at the University". (HEI I, 2003 Prospectus, page 28);

and

"The university is "student-centred" and will support a student learning experience which begins on initial contact and continues through life". (HEI K, Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005);

and

“Student view: There is a strong community feel at XXXX. Courses are highly rated..... Lectures and seminars tend to be small and lecturers very supportive.....”. (HEI M, The Sunday Times University Guide 2004);

and

“A peer guiding scheme that helps first years to settle in perhaps explains why dropout rates are far below the level expected”. (HEI N The Sunday Times University Guide 2004);

One thing to note is that there were many more institutions describing ways of supporting students than being student-focussed (twelve to four). Of the four institutions with some reference to student-centredness all but one described supportive mechanisms in place. This institution (HEI J) describes its learner-centred culture which is pivotal to its teaching and learning strategies. The approach that appears to have been taken in pursuit of this objective is that of high quality teaching. This institution in its prospectus makes reference to the fact they are one of only two universities to receive three National Teaching Fellowships in 2005. Given this particular approach to student-centeredness I would expect to see this HEI included in the ‘Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning’ section, which is the case.

With this factor of student support I noted no difference between the number of ‘new’ universities and more traditional universities. However, if I take the ‘old’ universities with a widening access focus I see a strong correlation between this factor and student support with all but one including both factors. Of the one that mentions student support but not widening access it is interesting to note that particular reference is made to support for students with disabilities rather than student support per se.

## **7.5 Teaching quality assessments**

Fourteen out of twenty institutions included some reference to this category which relates to the teaching quality assessments carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency. It is interesting to note who said what and where. All of the ‘old’ universities mentioned their success in quality assessments even if it had done less well than a ‘new’ university. There was one exception which is quite surprising in that it did perform reasonably well – it scored in the upper category of 22.0 to 22.9 and probably suggests that it views the statement of its performance more importantly than the omission of any reference thereto. These universities reported their success in a variety of places – website, Annual Report and prospectus which I found a bit surprising as I might have expected them all to have reported this particular success in their prospectus and/or their website where those applying would

see it. For the seven 'new' universities only three mentioned quality assessments. Of those three, one found itself in the 22.0 to 22.9 category, one in the 21.0 to 21.9 and one in the 20.0 to 20.9 thereby demonstrating that they appear to be playing to their strengths where they apply. I was, however surprised at the inclusion of the new university which found itself in the 20.0 to 20.9 category making reference to its apparent lack of success. However, when I reviewed the source of this information I discovered that it was The Sunday Times University Guide that provided that information:

"Teaching ratings were good enough to satisfy the assessors, without being spectacular, and the latest research grades would not be out of place in the university system". (HEI D, The Times Good University Guide, 2005).

This was an HEI visited and the focus was definitely on teaching to the point that I might have expected a better result but also the derivation of this quote explains why it was made although, as I say, this HEI itself would probably be disappointed with this result given its teaching focus.

It was also interesting to note that two 'new' HEIs which had performed well in the aggregate quality assessment score did not mention this in the printed materials used. Unfortunately, neither institution was visited and so it was not possible to follow this up.

Unsurprisingly, Table 16 below demonstrates that mention is more likely to be made of the quality assessment the better an institution has done.

Teaching Quality Assessment Score	Number of HEIs in Sample in Score Range/ Type of HEI	Number of HEIs in Sample Which Mentioned Quality Assessments
22.0 – 22.9	5 'old' 1 'new' 1 1960	5 'old' 1 'new'
21.0 - 21.9	4 'old' 3 'new' 1 1960	1 1960 5 'old' 2 'new'
20.0 – 20.9	2 'new'	1 'new'
18.0 – 19.9	1 'new'	0
Other	2 colleges	N/A
Total	20	14

**Table 16: Quality assessments mentioned in printed materials**  
Source: Research

## 7.6 Research Assessment Exercise

Twelve out of the twenty institutions included a reference to the RAE with all the 'old' universities and one of the 1960s universities including some reference to their performance. Two 'new' universities made mention of their performance:

"In the 2001 RAE the University attained:

- A top rating in psychology, computer science and art history
- A 4 rating showing a national excellence and demonstrating signs of international excellence in civil, electrical, marine and mechanical engineering, environmental sciences, geography, social policy and administration and sociology
- At least national levels of excellence in all submitted research
- 50% of research judged as showing international excellence (HEI J, Website);

and

"XXXX's 2001 RAE assessment was particularly welcome, reflecting as it does the excellence and relevance of our research portfolio. The world-class status of our Communications, Media and Cultural Studies area was confirmed by the award of a 5 rating for the second consecutive assessment, while Sociology, Art & Design, Law, Psychology, Social Work and Health Sciences all increased their ratings. XXXX was also rated in the top ten of post-1992 universities for research by the Guardian newspaper. This confirms the key role we are playing both in highlighting the importance of research as an indispensable and integral function of modern universities, and in making a vital contribution to local and regional regeneration through collaborations and partnerships". (HEI R, Website, 5 March 2005).

I can only speculate that the 'new' universities do not see this as their province. However, two 'new' universities which found themselves in the same categories as other HEIs had taken the decision to make mention of their performance presumably because they were appealing to a particular market. Of these two 'new' universities which mentioned the RAE and their results in their printed material, one was in the London area and so found itself in a very competitive market and the other was an HEI that was attempting to present itself strongly as a university (HEI J).

Research Exercise Score	Assessment	Number of HEIs in Sample in Score Range/ Type of HEI	Number of HEIs in Sample Which Mentioned Quality Assessments
5.5 – 6.4		5 'old'	5 'old'
4.5 – 5.4		4 'old' 2 1960	4 'old' 1 1960
2.5 – 3.4		3 'new'	2 'new'
1.5 – 2.4		4 'new'	0
Other		2 colleges	N/A
Total		20	12

**Table 17: RAE scores and mention in the printed materials by HEI**

Source: Desk Research

## 7.7 Size

Nine out of the twenty institutions mentioned size. This was done to indicate that both small and big size were 'a good thing' and had their advantages. So, for small size the emphasis was on the kind of close-knit community that created:

"The University of XXXX is a very special and rather unusual university.....It is relatively small and removed from the metropolitan centres .....(HEI C, 2004 Prospectus, introduction by Vice-Chancellor);

and

"XXXX is a small college of around 3,000 full-time and 1200 part-time students located mainly on two sites, with a satellite campus at ZZZZ. Whilst the size of the college enables a small community atmosphere.....". (HEI M, Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5);

and

"I came to an open day and really liked the atmosphere of the place, really friendly, unlike some other places I'd visited which I'd felt were too big and impersonal. XXXX is just the right size – large enough to have good facilities, but still small enough so that you don't feel swamped by it. All in all, this is a great place to live and study and whatever you're into, there'll be a club or society for you to join". (HEI N, Prospectus, 2004);

and

“This is a university made up of 4 campuses and a 5<sup>th</sup> under development as an on line learning facility. This means that the student population is divided into more manageable self-contained units which enable students to foster friendships with both their classmates and other students who are based at the same campus”. (HEI Q, Sunday Times University Guide, 2004);

and

“The great thing about XXXX is that it is big enough to have all the facilities of a major city, but small enough to be compact, friendly and accessible. Many students like it so much that they stay on in XXXX after graduating”. (HEI S, Prospectus, page 9)

On the other hand the advantages of a big organisation were seen as ‘big is beautiful’ in terms of the weight and power that it carried as a result:

“ XXXX is one of the UK’s larger universities with over 13,000 full-time student and has been a leader for over 100 years”. (HEI A, 2003 Prospectus, page 10);

and

“One of the traditional redbrick universities, the University of XXXX remains one of the giants of British higher education, a true heavyweight and an enduring bastion of quality and academic distinction. If heritage and tradition have any bearing upon your choice, then XXXX is for you”. (HEI B, 2004 Prospectus, page 7);

and

“XXXX in one of the UK’s favourite universities and last year received over 50,000 applications.” (HEI G, 2004 Prospectus, page 5);

and, for the same university:

“Established in XXXX, the University of XXXX is now one of the giants of the higher education system..... The University has always been at the forefront of innovation and has played a leading part in the development of modern higher education”. (HEI G, 2004 Prospectus, page 7);

It was also interesting to note those HEIs which did not include a reference to size when it might have been justified. So, HEIs E and I made no mention of their size other than HEI I did talk about the 'community' in which students learnt. This latter HEI is a fairly prestigious place albeit a relatively small prestigious place and I felt that they did not mention size per se as they wished to emphasise its academic credentials. HEI E was a surprise as it is the smallest HEI in terms of student numbers in the sample. However, this is the newest HEI and as such is probably trying to create its place in the sector and to be taken seriously.

None of the 'new' universities mentioned size. Their emphasis appeared to be more on other themes to which issue I will return at the end of this chapter.

## **7.8 Enhance employability/skills**

This was one of three most popular themes or categories with fourteen out of the twenty institutions making reference to it. I included in this category those references to skills development needed to support employability. All prospectuses had made reference to first destinations statistics in some form and I identified that as not being sufficient as a differentiator. All of the 'new' universities included a reference to this issue in their printed materials, whereas only four from the eight 'old' universities.

Employability can be defined as:

'A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforces, the community and the economy'. (Yorke, 2004)

Employability is a government concern for at least two reasons. First, it is important to its widening participation strategy because if it succeeds there will be more graduates looking for jobs. Secondly, the government believes that a good supply of highly skilled employable graduates is essential for national economic and social well-being. (HE Academy Website).

The report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), chaired by Lord Dearing (1997) helped raise the profile of employability within higher education. Until that time employability had been the province of programmes linked to professional accreditation like medicine or to 'thick sandwich' programmes. In most cases employability

was confined to the placement element of the programme of study. Skill development was not seen as an area of concern for higher education institutions. Since the Dearing Report higher education institutions have begun to address more directly issues of employability in addressing the challenges of globalisation, competition and the knowledge economy.

A report produced by Universities Scotland (2002) says that “in a few years, efforts to enhance employability have been transformed from an overemphasis on ‘bolting on’ skills to imaginative initiatives designed to prepare graduates for lifelong learning in a manner that reflects the needs of workforce development and of social inclusion”.

Examples of reference to employability or skills enhancement were:

“What I have always found particularly exciting about working in this University is the variety of activities taking place and the way in which our work impacts directly on the lives of so many people. You will see many examples of this in my last Annual Report – in teaching, where we are addressing the social inclusion agenda through out widening participation strategy and preparing graduates for employment through our Skills for Work programme and, in research, where we are working to bring solutions to problems of modern living. I am fortunate that, during my time as Vice-Chancellor, these activities have been carried out by members of the University of XXXX, ably supported by members of our University Council.....” (HEI A, Annual Report, 2001, page 2);

and

“Graduates who are successful in the job market often have skills in teamworking, problem solving and communication, in addition to good academic knowledge of their subject. Your academic curriculum will provide you with opportunities to develop your skills and employability and give you an insight into how your studies may be useful to you in the world of work. You could find yourself solving problems in teams. Using interactive case materials, working on real life projects and going on work placements. The Skills Centre provides students and staff with resources underpinning student skills development. Workshops, web-based materials and a resource centre will enable you to make the most of your university experience helping you to build a range of study and key skills. You have the opportunity of gaining an award for your extra-curricular work experience or volunteering which



recognises the important benefits to you of such activities". (HEI G, Prospectus, page 23);

and

"The key goals and objectives are: To provide educational experiences which enable students to reach their own potential; to acquire subject knowledge and appropriate professional skills; and to develop as "capable graduates who are independent and rational thinkers, have employment and life skills, are sensitive to environmental and social needs, can work collaboratively, and who are equipped for lifelong learning.....". (HEI J, University Teaching and Learning Strategy);

and

" Skills development – preparation for your future: Employers are increasingly looking to recruit graduates who can demonstrate that they have the skills and abilities to succeed in the workplace. Many of our programmes of study incorporate employability and career management skills into the curriculum to give you just that edge". (HEI K, Prospectus);

and

" XXXX is dedicated to the promotion of lifelong learning in which individuals exceed their expectations, strive to achieve academic excellence and enhance their contribution to society". (HEI M, Prospectus, 2004);

and

" At XXXX you can expect to gain useful knowledge and a range of skills from your degree course. But we realise that your future employers will look at more than just your degree certificate and we can offer other opportunities to develop the personal skills necessary for employment". (HEI O, Prospectus);

and

"It is a major contributor to access and participation, lifelong learning and the enhancement of the region's knowledge and skills base". (HEI Q, University Vision and Strategy to 2010, 2005);

and

“Our keyword is employability. Employability is defined by the CBI as: “the possession by an individual of the qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby help to realise his or her aspirations and potential in work”. (HEI T, Website);

What can be seen from the above extract is a confirmation of the statement made by the Universities UK and CSU Report that there has been movement generally in higher education towards consideration of employability issues. In fact, three of my sample appear in this Report as examples of good practice.

Traditionally, the focus on employability had been that of courses that had a vocational nature, largely confined to the former Polytechnics but also in the traditional universities in, for example, medicine, dentistry, architecture. This can be seen in the number of ‘new’ universities that make reference to this as an objective. However, I believe too that it is a reflection of the market in which they operate. I think that what can be seen from the inclusion in the four ‘older’ universities is a shift towards this agenda and recognition of the benefit to students in these approaches.

## **7.9 Widening access**

Thirteen out of the twenty institutions made reference to this theme. I defined widening access as a concerted and deliberate move to attract students to an HEI who came from non-traditional higher education backgrounds as well as a consideration of approaches to admission to include people who might not have the usual formal qualifications required for entry. Examples of references include:

“XXXX is committed to meeting the challenges of widening the range of types of students participating in higher education. We encourage applications from students from all social, educational and ethnic backgrounds”. (HEI I, 2005 Prospectus, page 5);

and

“Widening participation and partnership. Our commitment to being accessible to a wide cross-section of the community is supported by:

- Flexible learning opportunities
- A broad portfolio of programmes with strong academic and vocational emphasis
- A range of campuses". (HEI J, Website);

and

"Widening participation involves attracting higher numbers of students from under-represented socio-economic groups. For these students and all others, this Learning and Teaching Strategy seeks to create a level playing field by continuously designing the curriculum and learning environment in such a way as to make transparent what a student is trying to achieve, how they achieve it and how their achievement is going to be assessed". (HEI K, Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005);

and

"Many students are local and more than a quarter of last year's intake were mature. The socially-mixed group, which includes almost 30% from the lower social classes, stay the course and the dropout rate is well below the level expected by the funding council". (HEI M, Sunday Times University Guide, 2004);

and

"It is a major contributor to access and participation, lifelong learning and the enhancement of the region's knowledge and skills base". (HEI Q, University Vision and Strategy to 2010, 2005);

and

"We are committed to developing new academic programmes and new models of teaching and learning to meet the needs of students and employers. We have successfully introduced a range of extended degree pathways and are working with regional partners to develop innovative Foundation Degree programmes in areas such as businesses with IT, creative business technology, modern manufacturing and health and social care" (HEI R, Website).

With a government target of 50% of school leavers to enter higher education there does seem to be reasonable fit between those institutions that identified the enhancement of skills and employability approaches and widening access. This is to be expected in that widening access often involves a need to ensure that skills development and recognition is part of the student learning experience.

## **7.10 History**

Thirteen out of the twenty institutions mentioned their history in their printed materials:

“For almost X (period of time) we have proudly upheld the tradition of academic excellence, attracting scholars of international repute and students from all over the world”. (HEI C, Website);

and

“The roots of this University can be traced back to 1825 and our style and ethos combine the best of the old with the most stimulating of the new”. (HEI J, Prospectus);

and

“The origins of XXXX can be traced back to 1839.....” (HEI M, Prospectus, 2004);

and

“The University was established in as long ago as 1884.....Over half of the departments at XXXX have received an “excellent” rating for the quality of teaching and the University’s performance in the recent Research Assessment Exercise confirms our status as a world class research institution”. (HEI N, Prospectus, 2004);

and

“XXXX has a reputation for innovation and diversity of expertise. Since it was founded in the 1960s, XXXX has broken the mould in a number of areas” (HEI O, Website);

and

“It is also a traditional institution established in 1907”. (HEI S, Website);

All but one of the 'old' and the 1960s universities mentioned the period of time they had been in existence suggesting permanence and experience. Of the 'new' universities and colleges only three mentioned their history drawing attention to their roots apparently in an attempt to achieve the same impression of durability.

### **7.11 Friendliness**

Eight out of the twenty institutions made a point of describing themselves as friendly:

"This is a great place! It's ambitious and forward looking and now that XXXX is a city it's going through an exciting time of growth. But for all that, it still has a sense of community. I think it's the tightly knit buildings and the fact that we're so close to the centre of everything. Out and about you meet students no matter what time of day or night. It's a very student friendly place". (HEI L, Prospectus, page 1);

and

"I came to an open day and really liked the atmosphere of the place, really friendly, unlike some other places I'd visited which I'd felt were too big and impersonal. XXXX is just the right size – large enough to have good facilities, but still small enough so that you don't feel wanted by it. All in all, this is a great place to live and study and whatever you're into, there'll be a club or society for you to join". (HEI N, Prospectus, 2004);

and

"XXXX is a very special place – ideal for work and study". (HEI P, 2003 Prospectus, page 14 – quote from a member of academic staff))

Friendliness was a factor that didn't seem to apply to any particular kind of institution. It applied to all categories. At the same time size of institution ranged from the largest to the smallest. Some were based in cities and others in provincial areas of the country. So, the conclusion I reached was that this was a particular feature of these HEIs that they chose to promote.

## 7.12 Leadership

Four of the twenty institutions made reference in some aspect of their printed materials on their approach to management and/or leadership:

“Management policies and procedures that allow the College to respond quickly and effectively to changes and opportunities within the environment in which it operates”. (HEI E, Website);

and

“I have now been at the university for more than two years, and during that time I have worked hard to lead XXXX towards becoming a university of excellence, delivering world-class teaching and research, whilst serving the region”. (HEI J, Vice-Chancellor, website);

and

“The one immutable force today is change itself, and it's my personal objective to help develop an institution that has in it the mechanism for anticipating change.....”. (HEI Q, Vice-Chancellor, Website);

and

“In terms of management and leadership of the organisation it has an executive committee, chaired by the vice-chancellor which is responsible for the day to day management of XXXX, formulation of new plans and communication of key decisions. It is made up of the heads of administrative functions and the Faculty Principals with the latter having strategic and management responsibility for academic leadership, planning, finances, staff and student matters across their faculties. This arrangement is indicative of a senior management team and suggests a collective and organisational approach to managing the organisation”. (HEI S, Website).

On one hand it may be surprising that so few institutions mentioned either management or leadership of the organisation as in most organisations it is seen as a contributory factor to the nature of its culture (Handy, 1993); on the other hand the lack of any such reference could be explained by the printed materials accessed. However, given the fact that I went through the same process in each instance in terms of obtaining such printed materials suggests that these four institutions are different to the others in the sample in mentioning

such a facet. Also, as I will consider in chapters eight and nine leadership in HEIs is an interesting and differential concept.

There are no apparent connections between the four institutions mentioning leadership: one is a 'new' university, two 'old' universities and the last a higher education college.

I was surprised at the expansive description of HEI S ('old' university) given the predisposition towards a collegial approach to management in such institutions. Also, two of the four references come from Vice-Chancellors making very clear statements about how they saw their role and function.

**7.13 Culture**

Nine of the twenty institutions mentioned culture per se:

“The University provides an invigorating intellectual climate in which staff have close contacts with one another and colleagues in other UK and overseas universities and research establishments. All Schools in both the sciences and the arts are actively involved in pushing back the frontiers of knowledge”. (HEI C, Website);

and

“When I was applying for interactive media, it was a fairly new area for most places so I made my decision on the environment”. (HEI D, Prospectus, student case study, page 63);

and

“Caring for our students: developing a culture of self-esteem and mutual respect, and supporting their educational development, their well-being, and their welfare”. (HEI E, Website);

and

“We are committed to providing all of our students - regardless of their mode of study - with a challenging, stimulating, rewarding, supportive and enjoyable environment - one which is responsive to their needs, which facilitates their personal development

and which enables them to make a positive contribution to society". (HEI G, annual Report);

and

"The development of a learner-centred culture is pivotal to the strategy". (HEI J, University Teaching and Learning Strategy);

and

"To support the vision the university will uncompromisingly promote the following value set in a 'can do – no blame' culture:

- Become student-centred in all activities
- Encourage innovation
- Develop confidence
- Develop transparency and high standards of integrity
- Ensure equality of opportunity
- Help staff to be engaged and committed
- Ensure talent, success and quality are rewarded
- Create a partnership ethos" (HEI K, Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5);

and

"It's a living university, combining excellence with a great culture for study". (HEI P, Prospectus 2003 and website).

Given this thesis is about higher education culture I was interested to note that nine HEIs used either the word 'culture' or a synonym in the course of writing about themselves. All of the references suggest 'a way of doing things' thereby identifying things that are important. In these cases these 'things' either relate to student and/or staff learning or to the total environment in which the HEI is set.



#### **7.14 Excellence/quality references (other than teaching quality assessments and the RAE)**

A significant number of the sample (fourteen out of the twenty institutions) made some reference to this quality or excellence in a general sense. This meant that they did not necessarily define what quality was but, at the same time, suggested that it was something worthwhile:

“I was attracted to the university because of its stated ambition and commitment to excellence. I want to see the University becoming a university of excellence serving the region which delivers research and teaching to world class standards. The fostering of scholarship, enterprise and culture must be part of our mission as well as reaching out to the community in a comprehensive and inclusive way”. (HEI J, Vice-Chancellor, Website);

and

“XXXX is dedicated to the promotion of lifelong learning in which individuals exceed their expectations, strive to achieve academic excellence and enhance their contribution to society”. (HEI M, Prospectus, 2004);

and

“To increase and disseminate knowledge through the highest quality research, scholarship and teaching; to promote the intellectual and personal development of its staff and students; and to combine its role within the international academic community with a commitment to promote the language, culture, health and economy of XX, in partnership with the local Community”. (HEI N, Strategic Plan 2003/4 to 2007/8);

and

“I chose to study at XXXX because the course content is derived from up-to-the-minute research. Being taught by leading world experts really makes it special. Not many places offer that”. (HEI O, student, prospectus);

and

“The University of XXXX is a dynamic and innovative institution. Its performance in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, in which its international reputation as a groundbreaking research centre was greatly enhanced, demonstrates its commitment to high quality research across each of its four campuses and across all disciplines. For a young and vibrant university to have achieved such quality in a short time is outstanding”. (HEI Q, Website);

and

“The College does, however, face challenges as well as opportunities. Both a large and complex organisation, which has doubled in size in 10 years, it now has an annual turnover of nearly £400 million. The environment in which we operate is subject to increasing regulation and external oversight..... and the value placed on teaching and teachers needs to be reassessed. Higher education of quality, which XXXX undoubtedly delivers, is an expensive business”. (HEI S, Annual Report 2000/2001).

A substantial number of HEIs mentioned this themes of quality and/or excellence suggesting that they recognised the need to portray themselves as purveyors of something worthwhile, that is, that they realised that they were in a competitive environment and as such needed to put their best foot forward.

## **7.15 Reputation and status**

All twenty HEIs made some reference to this theme. I looked for words that suggested some kind of standing: traditional, longevity, standards, standing, student-centred, confident, best, world-class, international. Some examples can be seen below:

“At the national level almost 20% of students drop out from university for one reason or another without obtaining a degree. At the University of XXXX, less that 6% of students leave without a degree. This is the highest retention record of all universities in the XX of England and one of the best nationally”. (HEI A, 2003 Prospectus, page 37);

and

“XXXX is already consistently in the top 5 of new universities – but our aim is to be a world-class university”. (HEI J, Prospectus);

and

“As a forward-looking and innovative university XXXX is responsive to your need for flexible learning and life-long learning opportunities. That’s why our approach is ideal for so many people.....”. (HEI T, Prospectus, page 29).

For me, this demonstrated the need for the HEIs to find a way of promoting themselves positively in such a competitive environment and thereby show their worth and value.

## **7.16 Chapter conclusions**

From the above analyses it would seem that HEIs are both similar and dissimilar. There did seem to be a number of common themes that applied fairly generally: innovation in teaching and learning, student support, teaching quality assessments, research assessment results, employability, widening access, quality/excellence and reputation and status. An aspect of this analysis in relation to the list of themes is that many of them are externally determined. Certainly, teaching quality assessments and research assessment results have been determined by approaches taken by the HEFCE and the QAA. It could also be argued that there has been a compulsion towards issues like student support, widening access and employability as a result of government and external initiatives that have altered the student intake and so the teaching and support mechanisms that need to be put in place. So, all of the themes which scored highly in terms of a mention in the HEI printed materials are of that ilk. Where HEIs are different is where they mention features that single them out. So, themes like size, friendliness and student-centredness are indicative of a different kind of institution. However, when I looked at the results across the HEI categories of ‘old’, ‘new’, and 1960s I could see much more of a generalised view of the type of HEI with a great degree of consistency in how they described themselves within those categories. Not only were the same themes in evidence across these HEI types but also the weight of mentioning was similar. For example, the ‘new’ universities ranged in the number of themes mentioned from three to ten but six out of the seven listed between seven and ten themes. The range for the ‘old’ universities was between seven and twelve but the consistency was much the same with all but one HEI listing between seven and nine themes demonstrating a large degree of consistency and suggesting that similar aspects of a higher education institution are important to certain kinds of establishment.

From reading the printed materials I did feel that I knew each institution quite well, that I would be able to go to any of them and have a good idea of what to expect. In each instance I have made conclusions about each institution and each is different suggesting that they all have something unique to offer. I felt that if I were a student looking for a college or university that the printed materials which I had looked at would provide me with a picture of what was on offer. Next, in this chapter I look at the transcripts of the nine HEIs I visited and so I will have an opportunity to compare that which they have said with the 'reality' on the ground.

In terms of the Excellence Model an important aspect is that of leadership which is seen as one of the driving forces towards excellence. To that end it was interesting to note that only four HEIs made reference to leadership. As I have said above this may be reflection on the materials used. However, at the same time, I suspect that it is also a reflection of the notion of leadership in higher education and is a subject to which I will return in chapters eight and nine.

One institution scored across the themes more than any other – HEI G with a total of twelve out of fourteen 'hits'. This is an 'old' traditional university that has perhaps been surprised by its position in the published league tables and seems now to be actively considering how best to present itself. This is an HEI that I visited and so will say more about it in chapter eight.

It is clear from this analysis that universities play to their strengths. In particular, there does seem to be a difference between the 'old' and 'new' HEIs with the former more likely to refer to teaching quality assessments, research assessment, history and quality generally; on the other hand the 'newer' institutions are more likely to mention employability and skill enhancement, widening access and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Ultimately for me, there were issues about this method of research which I will address in section 9.5.

## Chapter 8

**Research outcomes: applicability – does the culture of higher education (if such a thing exists) hinder or help the applicability of the model through interviews with members of staff in nine of the twenty HEIs in the sample**

### 8.1 Introduction

In chapter four, sections 4.9.1.2 and 4.9.2.2, I described the rationale behind the data collection and data analysis approaches to this research method. In this chapter I will describe the outcome of my analysis of the transcripts taken from the nine interviews conducted with higher education institutions to identify any common themes that might constitute a culture and that might help or hinder the applicability of the Excellence Model.

Table 18 shows the main themes coming from the nine interviews. These are identified as the main themes because they were the most frequently mentioned and significant issues from my analysis of the interview transcripts.

HEI/ Theme	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	Total
Structure	X				X	X	X	X		5
Academic autonomy/mindset	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	8
Leadership		X	X	X	X	X	X			6
Management	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	7
Quality	X	X	X	X				X	X	6
Change	X	X	X			X			X	5
Students (how they are viewed)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
History, status and reputation	X		X		X		X			4

**Table 18: Cultural themes per HEI visited**  
**Source: Research**

As can be seen from Table 18 my analysis of the nine HEIs visited suggests that there are elements which are common to higher education in that all instances but one (history, status and reputation) more than 50% of the respondents mentioned this theme. These are:

- Structure

- Academic autonomy/mindset
- Leadership
- Management
- Quality
- Change
- Students (how they are viewed)
- History, status and reputation

I plan in the following paragraphs to look at each of the above themes in more detail

## **8.2 Structure**

Table 19 shows the issues that arose in each of the five HEIs where structure came up in the course of the interview conversations as a significant factor in the way in which the organisations functioned. There were three main consistent issues through the five HEIs:

- Highly devolved authority, particularly for academic staff
- Divide between academic and support functions
- Relationship between the centre and faculties

A	E	F	G	H
Authority highly devolved	Divide because of academic staff	'Us' and 'them' mindsets	Devolved structures	Departmental structure
Institution-wide vis-à-vis initiative local activity	Conflict or tension between academic and support staff	Silo mentality	More administration at Faculty level	Department as primary unit
Divide between academic and support functions		People doing what they like	Tension between academics and administration	Faculties not strong identifiers for academic staff
Relationship between centre and Faculties				No identification with central services
Divide between those who have power and those who don't				For support staff the reference point is the university
Efficient and effective use of operational units				Concern on the part of academic staff where university fits into the league tables
				Departments don't feel anything has been devolved to them e.g. the budgets

**Table 19: Structure as a significant theme in nine HEIs visited**  
**Source: Research**

## **.2.1 Highly devolved authority, particularly for academic staff**

This issue relates also to that of academic autonomy which I will discuss in section 8.3 of this chapter but refers here to the kinds of departmental and discipline focus for academic staff. It describes too where the power base appears to sit for some staff.

“And so we put in a new structure and we asked Faculties to have the same structure within the Faculties. They then came back and said it doesn't work for us, we want it a different way, so that's been allowed. And that's actually a slight worry for us with our coming audit because we think the auditors will say that we should have insisted they all stay the same”. (Transcript A, lines 372-378);

and

“And so, they will see themselves as the primary unit – in almost everything they do given that priorities are set by us, there is nevertheless a strong departmental culture with a direct link between the Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor and the departmental heads. We have Faculties but they are relatively weak. They’re not a strong identifier for members of academic departments”. (Transcript H, lines 5-10)

At the same time there was a view that the faculty was *the* organisational unit and that was based on an efficiency model:

“Basically, the organisational unit is becoming the Faculty. And it is all about more efficiency”. (Transcript G, lines 341-342).

Interestingly, in the case of HEI H the academic staff did not see that things had been devolved to them:

“Yes, except departments don’t feel that anything has been devolved to them. There’s a big debate in the institution about devolution because the budgetary framework we have doesn’t devolve budgets down to departments. It devolves it to a certain extent and the question is should we go further. So, it isn’t constructed in terms of devolution”. (Transcript H, lines 202-206).

So, there was a devolved structure in terms of a departmental focus but the budgets had not necessarily followed. Academic departments were seen as self-contained units:

“We’ve just restructured the Faculties and we’re establishing more administration at Faculty level and so that’s going to be quite interesting because we’ll have Deans who are academics and HR Managers in Faculty and Finance Managers – they are quite powerful”. (Transcript G, lines 260-263);

and

“I would say that it’s a university that has a very strong departmental ethos. By that, I mean that the primary unit, as in many universities, is the department. But, the strong links – the sense of identity that most people working in a university have, will be with their department not with a Faculty, or a School or anything above that”. (Transcript H, lines 1-5).



Within a highly devolved structure there is the issue of whether organisation-wide initiatives could be implemented as can be seen from the following quote:

“Widening participation is a much more recent thing and I’m sure that all departments are aware of our reputation and our efforts in that area. Whether they are all on board in quite the same way, I don’t know. Having said that, areas like medicine and vet science, which have no difficulty in getting high quality students at all, actually have a lot of initiatives in terms of widening participation which is interesting. So, it shows that even departments that don’t have to think about getting their numbers in, actually have a concern about widening their programmes to non-traditional students”. (Transcript A, lines 53-60).

### **8.2.2 Divide between academic and support functions**

Another main theme to come through the discussions on structure was the divide between academic and support functions:

“One of the things that struck me when I came here was that there was quite a divide between academic and administration. I don’t know if that’s common in all institutions but I’d come from outside a university and I found it very striking.....” (Transcript A, lines 70-72);

and

“I think there is a divide because of the academic staff. Traditionally, academic staff had more holidays and were paid more – their time was their own within the institution; they were their own boss; they entered the classroom and closed the door and they were their own boss. When I first started here in my late 20’s when I went into the classroom I did what I wanted to do. It was my job plan and I was trusted to get on with the job. Now, I don’t think that happens. I think there is always this conflict or tension between academic and support staff. That doesn’t mean to say that they don’t get on well but I think there are people on the support staff who see academic staff as having better pay and conditions than the support staff. Okay, the conditions are changing and the holidays are still coming down and I think that the academic staff see the stock of the support staff rising – why do we need more support staff? This institution is about teaching students; I don’t think it’s a serious tension but it does exist. I don’t think it manifests itself in anything unhealthy particularly but I think that tension does exist”. (Transcript E, lines 174-187)

and

“Yes, I think it’s because we still have quite a bit of a silo mentality. People operating in their little bit, not understanding how the whole needs to interact and work and that there is resistance to that, we need to do that because it’s our area”. (Transcript F, lines 463-466);

Whilst the following quote doesn’t quite demonstrate a divide between academic and support functions, it does hint at such but it does provide an insight into the different perceptions of support and academic staff:

“Within departments the reference group will be the discipline and the discipline in an international context. Within support areas the reference point is the University, its students mostly.....So the support staff has a sense of the University as a corporation; within departments you have the sense of the University as a holding company. (Transcript H, lines 135-140).

### **8.2.3 Relationship between the centre and faculties**

As well as there being an issue about the interrelationship between the various functions in an HEI there was also an issue about the relationship between the academic staff and the administration:

“Well, I would say that the administration are still seen to a certain extent, as the villains. You know, the faceless bureaucrats in Senate House make us do that. You do still find people who say that, which winds me up a bit because I always say that Senate House is a building. And so I think among certain academic staff there is that perception. Although again, I think that is changing”. (Transcript A, lines 153-167);

and

There is also a tension between academia and administration:

“Academics regard us as being very bureaucratic and we do often get very frustrated with those who refuse to basically follow procedures, which are often, not always but

often there, for good reasons and those that tend to bypass it". (Transcript G, lines 243-245);

and

"They don't identify with the central services. So, they don't feel it's their job to implement central University policies. They think it's their job to work for the XX Department to progress the XX Department's interests rather than the University's". (Transcript H, lines 183-186).

Rowland (2002), talking about fragmentation within higher education, identifies one reason for this phenomenon as the separation between teachers and managers. He argues that in a climate of external standards and quality assurance procedures handed down that managers and administrators are likely to be viewed as part of a culture of compliance – agents of external forces – whose values are sharply at odds with academic values and whose influence is increasingly viewed with suspicion. However, whilst there are undoubtedly 'academic values' in general and differences between collegial and managerial values, there would seem from my research that there are also differences between institutional and departmental orientations.

## **Conclusions**

The picture provided by these quotes and my analysis shows organisations that do not function as one. There appear to be different priorities and little appreciation of how they can work together or contribute to the whole. There is an 'us' and 'them' mindset with different priorities and perceptions.

### **8.3 Academic autonomy**

The theme of academic autonomy was a significant factor in eight of the HEIs visited.

The concept of academic autonomy comes from a theory of professionalism, according to which, the abstract knowledge and complex skills possessed by professionals make it difficult for the layperson to judge the quality of their services.

A	B	C	D	E	G	H	I
Academic research	Accountability as it impacts on academic freedom	Academic freedom as a cardinal value	People fighting their corner for their Faculty in a highly devolved culture	Staff not sure how to cope with the freedom they have	Where is an academic's loyalty?	Primacy of research	Relationship between teaching and research
Academic autonomy		Directive management not well received by staff	Staff consultation and involvement	Staff too focussed on themselves	Self-motivation for their own objectives	Value of teaching	
Changing nature of equality	Relationship between teaching & research	Consultation expected	Academics better at criticising and seeing the negatives	No control (on who is working from home)	Inevitably institutions that have a lot of academics will have a sort of arrogance/confidence	Relationship between teaching and research	Teaching as a second rate function
Relationship between teaching & research	Changes in those programmes that are under-subscribed	Devolved structure	Individual lecturer largely autonomous behind classroom doors	No effective form of appraisal	Tension between teaching & research		Research as a key function
Committee structures				Staff feel that they are made accountable	Lack of control over research compared to teaching		
				Need for staff to reflect on their own practice	Helps if administrator has PhD		

**Table 20: Academic autonomy as a significant theme in nine HEIs visited**  
**Source: Research**

The main themes that can be identified from Table 20 are:

- Academic freedom as a cardinal and underpinning value and the way in which accountability processes impact on academic freedom
- The relationship between teaching and research
- Management of academic staff

I plan in the following section to describe in more detail what each of these themes meant for my interviewees.

### **8.3.1 Academic freedom as a cardinal and underpinning value and the way in which accountability processes impact on academic freedom**

As well as support and academic functions not finding ways of working together as was described in section 8.2.2, one of the dominant issues and themes arising from this research and its impact on organisational functioning is the concept of academic autonomy:

“But one of the things I should perhaps have mentioned earlier is that there is a strong culture of autonomy in this institution. So, academic staff identify with their department or even with their research group and they don’t necessarily identify with the university. They see the university but they don’t think that they are the University. And I think there is quite a strong culture and it’s not exactly encouraged but it has been allowed to happen so there is the view of autonomous units and what that actually does is it makes it very difficult to impose, I don’t mean impose, that’s not the right word but it makes it difficult to introduce new systems or procedures, for example, in relation to quality assurance for teaching because there is this ‘you can’t tell us what to do, we’re the department, we’ll do this anyway’. (Transcript A, lines 74-83);

and

“.....we still cherish academic freedom as being a cardinal value..... I think they would not take kindly, do not take kindly, to being told what they can and cannot do”. (Transcript C, lines 139-141).

Additionally, the question of how that academic freedom impacts on the organisation and other staff within HEIs was commented upon:

“And we were talking about this and the fact that some of these staff were not coming. There was a Pro-Vice Chancellor at the meeting who said ‘well, we can’t make them’ and I said ‘why can’t we make them?’ ‘What would you do if they didn’t come?’ and I said ‘surely, they are in breach of their contract?’ Well, yes but you couldn’t – I said ‘as a member of the administration, if I turn round to my line manager and say, ‘I’m not doing that training’, in my view I would be subject to disciplinary action. But his view was ‘well, you can’t do that to academic staff’. And I think that is a very telling difference in the perception of what academic staff can do and what administrators can do. But also, as administrators we would never dream of saying, ‘no, we’re not doing that because we would see it as part of our job whereas the

academics say ' we're not doing that because that's not part of our job, it's just some training you want us to do'. Our job is teaching and research". (Transcript A, lines 476-488);

and

"There are many excellent people. There are dozens who are fairly senior and it goes back to that kind of ..... just as an academic will say 'but if Finance decides where to buy my microscopes from, they'll be telling me next what to research, so my autonomy is my autonomy'. Any kind of accountability affects my academic freedom. And is therefore intolerable". (Transcript B, lines 371-375);

and

"Our ex Director of Finance described it not as an institution but like trying to manage 300 corner shops – they've all got their own way of doing things, they won't stick to corporate procedures, they won't respond in a timely way and it's almost as if they aren't employees. Substantial amounts of money arrive in their bank accounts at the end of every month by some mystical way that has nothing to do with their teaching or their research". (Transcript B, lines 535-541);

and

"So to sum up on culture: the culture from the top is we're an HE, but from the bottom up, staff want the freedom of that but I'm not sure they want the responsibilities. Maybe an analogy is like the German situation when the Berlin wall came down; we used to tightly manage and people knew where they were going and when the wall came down, people got freedom but they didn't know how to cope with it. I get the impression that, under the current regime, they (senior management) expect staff to cope with the freedom and act like academics whereas I'm not too sure that there are too many academics in this institution. I think there are a lot of teachers". (Transcript E, lines 499-506);

Significantly, not all of the above observations were made by administrators. The interviewees in HEIs D and E were people now working in administration but were also two people who had taught and in the case of HEI E the interviewee was still teaching.

The issue of academic autonomy was a common theme coming from all nine HEIs visited and to a lesser or greater extent arose in one form or another. (In HEI H it came up in the context of organisational values and the things that were deemed to be important; in HEI F it was in the context of structure):

“The other problem within the University is that, because people think they have some freedom, they can go off and do what they like. Deans are quite good at doing this and want to do things their own way which is fine to a certain extent but sometimes it goes on too far”. (Transcript F, lines 506-509);

and

“I think there is a value placed on people who are good teachers but if you’re not a researcher, you will not be valued. If you’re a researcher who is a good teacher, you will get valued”. (Transcript H, lines 75-77).

Most of my interviewees saw academic autonomy both as a necessary part of academic functioning and as an inhibiting and restrictive aspect within HEIs. I think it’s less the concept and more the outworking of it that’s seen as a problem. So, a central issue in understanding the culture of higher education institutions is how to integrate the needs and demands of institutional and departmental issues. In all the interviews, these are seen as in conflict, that is, thesis and antithesis, not in terms of a possible synthesis. This inability to synthesise conflicting views, in contrast to ‘one must win and the other lose’, works against any kind of institutional thinking or development.

### **8.3.2 The relationship between teaching and research**

When thinking about the professionalism of academic staff there is also the question of which professional are they? Many academics see themselves primarily as researchers rather than teacher-scholars:

“I think 60% of our funding comes from student funding, from our under-graduate programmes but you wouldn’t know it. The RAE not the QAA – and it’s the range and depth and quality of our research proposals, our research activities that give me status and kudos, as when I pop over to the astronomy convention in Arizona or whatever it might be in Geneva, it’s the research I’m doing. I can’t turn up at international conferences and say “all my undergraduates passed and our grade profile is the best in

the UK.” Nobody cares about that. What I’m doing for the ESRC, that’s what counts”. (Transcript B, lines 424-431);

and

“.....there’s a tension between research and teaching as there are in a lot of institutions and that will affect very much how people work and operate and how people may feel. Ever since I’ve been here there’s been a kind of continuing attempt to enhance the status of teaching. And it’s getting there and it’s improving but the people who are very much focussed on teaching can feel like second class citizens and I think are to some extent treated like second class citizens. It’s getting better but I think that’s one aspect of it as well”. (Transcript G, lines 144-150);

and

“I think there is a value placed on people who are good teachers but if you’re not a researcher, you will not be valued. If you’re a researcher who is a good teacher, you will get valued”. (Transcript H, lines 75-77);

and

“But research in this institution does actually drive, it has to drive because for an organisation of this size, it’s the jam on the bread that makes us viable”. (Transcript I, lines 28-30).

The fact that academic staff are attempting to fulfil the roles and functions of two professions in research and teaching has an impact too on the way in which they perceive themselves and perhaps more importantly students. This is an issue to which I will return later in this chapter in section 8.8. This is perhaps, another example of thesis and antithesis, this time between research and teaching with little or no attempt at synthesis of the two. I realise that some people argue that these two roles are inextricably linked but from my research I did find a separation in the minds of some.

Like a lot of ideals, the notion of professional staff subscribing to a list of rights and responsibilities is fine whilst they do that but the problem arises when they don’t, as there is neither the culture nor the appetite in higher education to deal with those who do not fulfil their professional responsibilities:



“We have never had an effective form of appraisal in education and that’s one of the drawbacks to the system – that’s about education all the way through from primary school probably to Oxford and Cambridge – in terms of teaching ability we don’t have an effective appraisal system”. (Transcript E, lines 325-328).

### **8.3.3 Management of academic staff**

I will be discussing later in this chapter in sections 8.4 and 8.5 the issues of management and leadership in higher education. However, a strong message coming from this research was that, given the practice of academic autonomy, some approaches to the management and leadership of academic staff was more appropriate than others:

“We are in a more managerial culture where there is a greater tendency than in the past to be directive and I don’t think that is particularly well received by staff. Actually, most Schools have ethics committees and these issues would be discussed there. Issues would be dealt with in a consensual way. I don’t think colleagues would take kindly to a sharp rebuke just coming from the top. There would be an expectation that there was consultation about it. And I think, generally speaking, that there would be”. (Transcript C, lines 143-149);

and

“Well, again, what will be provided in terms of information that is centrally decided but in a consultative sort of way. For instance, I was chairing the Academic Affairs Committee which is the senior academic committee in the institution last week and once a year, because we’re responsible for producing summary statistics on all the fields, comes to a meeting of that Committee and we have a discussion about what modifications we want to make to those statistics for the next round – what do we need to know how are we going to find that out and so, there are representatives there from all the areas so, although it would be central, they have been consulted. They are happy – they will still say “not invented here”. (Transcript D, lines 149-157).

## **Conclusions**

Academic autonomy was a significant feature of HEIs that contributes to how they function and see themselves. It was perceived as both a positive and a negative, sometimes dependent on whether that person was an academic or not but this was not exclusively the

case. The impact of this cultural aspect of higher education institutions is a matter to which I will return in the next chapter.

## **8.4 Leadership**

There were six HEIs that mentioned leadership as a significant factor. Table 21 below shows the issues that arose in the context of leadership as a theme. This section looks specifically at leadership and is deemed to be different to management which issue will be considered in the next section. This difference can be seen as an essential difference between universities and commerce, where the top person is expected to be both manager and leader (Middlehurst and Elton, 1992).

Linked in to the issue of leadership is that of collegiality which can be defined as the relationship between colleagues, united in a common purpose and respecting each other's abilities to work towards that purpose. Thus, the word collegiality can connote respect for another's commitment to the common purposes and ability to work toward it. Nowadays there is no one understanding of the word collegiality and what it means in practice. According to Middlehurst and Elton (1992) the main element is the exercise of individual autonomy within the framework of collective action – that is, that which extends the leadership function from the senior staff to all the staff in an organisation. This view led to what came to be called 'organised anarchy', in which the majority of academics moved independently of each other in approximately the same direction, a direction far more in line with institutional aims than that of imposed leadership which has replaced it. (Cohen and March, 1986).

B	C	D	E	F	G
Drive and leadership needed	Great strategist	Strong centre	Lack of consultation	VC introduced a clear strategic direction	Leader's impact on the culture
Need to change culture	VC as university's key hero and villain	Centralised systems	No appropriate or realistic implementation plans	Re-articulation of mission statement	A cliquy institution
Lack of shared strategic vision	Forceful personality with tremendous self-confidence	Strategy determined at the centre and cascaded down into Faculties	An inappropriate focus	New organisational structure as an approach to change	Senior Management has a high regard to itself
Evidence of charismatic leadership	Consultation with senior staff	Things centrally decided in a consultative way	Too single minded in their strategic visioning	Leading from the front	Need to be more self-critical
	Staff expect consultation	Lack of QAA attention given to leadership	Low morale because of a lack of certainty		No major effort to change as a result of a degree of assessment
			Strong leader (not necessarily popular) needed		Major change expected as a result of a new VC
					Hero=someone who does what senior management wants; Villain=someone who opposes them
					Critical independence not popular and yet a cardinal value

**Table 21: Leadership as a significant theme in nine HEIs visited**  
**Source: Research**

The main issue arising from these interviews were:

- What is seen to constitute effective leadership
- What is seen to constitute ineffective leadership

Middlehurst and Elton (1992), following Kotter (1990), define management as about coping with complexity and the functions of management are to order and control, mainly so as to make an organisation efficient and effective within agreed objectives; the task of leadership for them is to clarify the direction of change and to make the members of the organisation willing, even enthusiastic partners in the change process. Whilst it must be remembered that Adair (1988) was talking about leadership in the context of the army, nevertheless he describes a leader as someone who can enable a group or organisation to fulfil its mission *and* (his italics) hold it together as a working entity. Peters (1989) identifies a new view of leadership as learning to love change in a period of change and chaos, a circumstance in

which, it could be argued, higher education institutions find themselves. A leader is then someone with the appropriate knowledge and skill to lead a group to achieve its ends willingly, someone who accompanies people on a journey, guiding them to their destination.

#### **8.4.1 What is seen to constitute effective leadership**

In the course of this research each of my interviewees who commented on leadership was able to describe what they thought constituted effective leadership.

The ability to provide a sense of drive and strategic visioning was seen as particularly important:

“I have to say that compared to other parts of the education sector that I’ve worked in the University is well resourced. It might complain about the level of resource per FTE etc. but if you squeeze, you can find some quite substantial cash reserves. So, it is not not having the money that’s been the difficulty but having the drive and leadership from the top to say these things must happen, they must happen by this date”. (Transcript B, lines 37-42);

and

“Senior leaders have to stand up and say this is what we’re going to do, this is why, these will be the benefits and these will be the anxieties and the difficulties. We recognise all of those latter points but it’s still worth the journey”. (Transcript B, lines 70-73);

and

“They have to develop a strategy for that but I think you’ve got to have a view of what’s going on the ground. I think I’ve said this to you before in that to implement change, you need two things: a vision for the future and a vision of reality. And I think we have a vision for the future. I remain to be convinced that there’s a vision of reality. To be blunt what’s below us on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor (staff) here is actually capable of delivering what is in the strategy” (Transcript E, lines 248-253);

and

“14 years ago the Vice Chancellor made it very clear that it was research, research, research! I think that message has got through to the extent that people have absorbed it into their value system or people with those values have been appointed so that it becomes the norm”. (Transcript H, lines 131-134).

Although this is the only reference in the HEI H transcript to leadership I thought it was particularly useful to include as it demonstrates how a leader can make a difference to the strategic direction of the institution.

Additionally, strength of personality was seen as necessary:

“No, but that’s one aspect of charismatic leadership. Effectively, I’m here because the Registrar and Secretary, XX XX, had done some work on service quality that turned into hundreds of reports, thousands of meetings, dozens of committees and one thing that 5 years of work came out that was positive was to go for an external national standard like IIP. Let’s go for that. He’s in the process of retiring. Our new Registrar is from XXXX. Who knows if he has the same commitment. But it was one person who said ‘things need to change, things need to get better, we need to think about the department rather than a bit of finance, estates, a bit of personnel. So, will you sign up to it?’” (Transcript B, lines 271-279);

and

“XXXX (previous vice-chancellor) was an extremely forceful personality with tremendous self-confidence, so he dictated with a small group of people, what happened. (Transcript C, lines 410-411);

and

“The Directorate is very strong and that consists of, well, the Vice Chancellor in principle, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, but at the moment we haven’t got one because there’s no-one in post and the previous one left and we haven’t yet replaced him, and he did a lot of the academic leadership. We’ve got a Pro-Vice Chancellor for research but the other members of the directorate would be, the Secretary and Registrar, the Director of Estates and Finance. We haven’t one director for HRM and Learning Resources, so human and learning resources, which is interesting. That’s

it, I guess. Oh, and External Relations, which includes admissions and marketing and other outward facing stuff". (Transcript D, lines 46-55);

and

"That was the time I felt most secure because I think we had a stronger leader. He might not have been popular but in many ways show me a popular leader and I'll show you a useless leader. He wasn't a popular man and he had lots of faults but he was a strong leader". (Transcript E, lines 127-130).

Also, consultation was seen to be an important part of leadership:

".....we still cherish academic freedom as being a cardinal value..... I think they would not take kindly, do not take kindly, to being told what they can and cannot do. That relates more to what I've just been saying. We are in a more managerial culture where there is a greater tendency than in the past to be directive and I don't think that is particularly well received by staff. Actually, most Schools have ethics committees and these issues would be discussed there. Issues would be dealt with in a consensual way. I don't think colleagues would take kindly to a sharp rebuke just coming from the top. There would be an expectation that there was consultation about it. And I think, generally speaking, that there would be". (Transcript C, lines 139-149).

Interestingly the qualities looked for in academic leaders as describe above are not any different to those identified by Kotter (1990), Adair (1988) and Peters (1989). That is:

- Drive to see things through
- Vision and strategic thinking
- Strength of character to deal with the conflicting priorities
- Engaging in consultative processes

#### **8.4.2 What constitutes ineffective leadership**

My interviewees also expressed views on what constitutes ineffective leadership:

"It's true that we do all these things on the ground but in terms of vision and leadership and getting a step change in the institutional culture, that's not because

four Deans, the Vice Chancellor and four or five PVCs necessarily set out a vision for innovation in teaching, learning and assessment, it's because it's happening and what they are doing is capturing what's happening as good practice and then later on using that example as example of the fact that we're changing and there is some very good practice, there is some very exciting work. There are attempts to work share, that's good practice but it's more of a bottom up innovation rather than a response to a top-down vision. Or even better, rather than a response to a shared vision through consultation, through looking at the needs of students and learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I'm not convinced that those things happen". (Transcript B, lines 112-122);

and

"I think, to be blunt, it stems right from the top. I think the senior management of this institution has a high regard for itself and maybe it's appropriate. And it operates ..... maybe another way to describe this place is that it's a bit cliquey as well. The senior management is a bit cliquey and it has this self-perpetuating congratulatory sort of culture which reinforces the idea that we're doing well when maybe we need a bit more critical sort of assessment and a bit more responsiveness". (Transcript G, lines 15-20).

This latter quote was meant to suggest a lack of strategic visioning on the part of the leaders of the organisation leaving it up to the people to do.

## **Conclusions**

Given the supposed collegial nature of HEIs it was interesting to see how significant a factor leadership was. It was perhaps less surprising that staff could identify what constituted effective and ineffective leadership but what was perhaps surprising was that these qualities were not significantly different to what might be perceived as generic leadership qualities. Of course, the qualities may be the same or similar, but how to employ them may require different practices in different circumstances.

### **8.5 Management**

Management is defined in the Oxford dictionary as 'the professional administration of business concerns, public undertakings etc'. Middlehurst and Elton (1992) define management in contrast with leadership as about coping with complexity and the functions of

management are to order and control, mainly so as to make an organisation efficient and effective within agreed objectives.

Table 22 describes the issues which arose from each of the seven HEIs which mentioned management in any extensive way. The main themes which arose out of this analysis were:

- Managerialism and increasing signs of managerialism
- More top-down management/control from the Centre
- Approaches to decision-making

As can be seen from Table 22 there were seven HEIs that mentioned management, mostly the same as those who mentioned leadership. That is, HEIs C, D, E, F and G mentioned both.

A	C	D	E	F	G	I
Resistance to management	Managerialism in evidence	Strong centre	Not heavily managed	Need people who can manage	Not keen on management	Relationship between management and external initiatives
Managerialism	Culture change	Centralised systems	Management not particularly well regarded	More focus on providing managers with the skills they need to manage	Increasing influence of finance function	Increasing managerialism
Increasing signs of management	More top-down management	Strategy determined at the centre and cascaded to Faculties	Relationship between academic committees and senior management	Difficulty in getting people to recognise that they actually need those skills	Decisions made by committees	
	More control from the Centre	Things centrally decided in a consultative way		Being professional about management	Informal networks	
	VC with management experience			More business-oriented than 15 years ago	Informal ways can be more important	
	Managerial initiatives			Need to improve but don't record and track enough		
	Mixed response to managerial initiatives			Wider university not always apparent		
				Lack of need to see efficiencies		

**Table 22: Management as a significant theme in nine HEIs visited**  
Source: Research



### 8.5.1 Managerialism

Towards the end of the eighties, the government indicated that they expected public sector managers to include consideration of the impact of their resource allocation decisions on the quality of output in their future strategic plans. This external approach to the management of public sector organisations was described as 'managerialism' (Pollitt, 1990). Trow (1994), describing managerialism in the context of higher education, says that the approach is not just a concern for the effective management of specific institutions in specific situations but that the 'ism' points to an ideology, to a faith or belief in the truth of a set of ideas which are independent of specific institutions.

There were examples of how managerialism was perceived:

".....one of the ways that we did manage quite tightly on the financial side, was that all posts that fell vacant had to go through a process through to the Academic Committee for filling. And inevitably, that introduced delay and that, of course, was deliberate because you make turnover savings whilst that was happening and the post may then be returned but Academic Committee might say: 'no, that post is not being returned and you have to do without it'. So that's how it might impinge on the academic staff". (Transcript A, lines 420-426);

and

"I'm absolutely certain that was a factor in his appointment – he is certainly introducing certain managerial initiatives into the University which although his predecessor – his predecessor, you know, was the first person whom one spoke of as being the Chief Executive. There was a definite change of style when XXXX (previous vice-chancellor) came but I don't think he was especially enamoured of managerial initiatives, as such". (Transcript C, lines 405-409);

and

"And there has been more focus on providing managers with the skills that they need to manage, like financial skills, understanding accounts etc. The difficulty is, though, getting people to recognise that they actually need those kinds of skills. So, whilst I think we've been quite good at dealing with the hard things like finance, 'cause it's quite a discrete area, I think we're probably less good at dealing with other managerial

aspects in terms of managing people which I think is probably just the tension that we have in that if you tend to think 'we're academics managing peers, we're colleagues, we don't need management', to a certain extent that's true but it's not always the case. It goes back to what we were saying earlier about employer and employee. I don't think we can divorce the fact that we are employees but people maybe don't necessarily think about it in that way and I am not sure that we should think of it in that way. I think if there is any way that we can get the balance between 'well, we're peers', although we are actually employees, I'd rather go for 'well, we're peers' but things need to happen – I wouldn't say indirectly – but we don't need to be over-dogmatic about management approaches. We've tried to be more professional about management". (Transcript F, lines 253-269);

and

"Like a lot of institutions management is still regarded as a bit of a dirty word. It's an awfully lot more accepted than it used to be. But they're still certainly not terribly keen on it and certainly not a terribly well managed institution. It's come a long way in some areas since I started". (Transcript G, lines 85-89);

and

"There is no doubt that what we're saying is that in high-level committees we actually have to be more managerial". (Transcript I, lines 277-281).

So, there were a number of examples of increasing management and/or managerialism and some senior staff being appointed because they had such experience that could be brought to bear in higher education.

### **8.5.2 More top-down management/control from the Centre**

Increasing examples of management and control from the Centre was in evidence in the majority of HEIs where management was a key theme:

"We've had 15 years or more of quite poor financial settlements but the last 12 years or so, we've actually been very secure financially because there has been some tight financial management and so actually in terms of our financial position, we are a well-funded university. I think perhaps a bit of a perception now that we concentrated on

making ourselves financially secure, perhaps at the expense of investing in the University. It's one of those things – it's a balance really. But we are now.....we have a new Vice-Chancellor and there is a kind of 'we're going to spend money to help us get back up the table'. (Transcript A, lines 19-26);

and

"He did change the culture. The culture has changed. Many people would say that it is less collegial than it used to be. There's much more top down management. I think this is true of universities generally but it is perhaps more conspicuous here than in some, probably because they are much larger and had to go down that route years before we did. It's not by any means universally popular with staff. A feature of the senior management of this University now is that it is more managerial. There are more people in senior posts who did not come through the strict academic route as was the case in the past". (Transcript C, lines 121-128);

and

"In terms of the budgetary power – I guess money is power to a large extent – a lot of it is still quite centralised. A lot of the budgeting is not very devolved. In terms of the human resource management, it is very much with the Heads of School. They are formally the line management for all the staff in their schools although big Schools have Deputy Heads, sometimes several, to cover various aspects so that would be formally delegated". (Transcript D, lines 31-36);

and

"And, if anything, the way we've shifted in the last 5 years (which I probably should have said at the beginning) is that we are more business-oriented than we might have been 15 years ago. And in fact, some people think it's all about operating a business now". (Transcript F, lines 192-195);

and

"The current structure which is only really just evolving reflects the increasing importance of financial management and the increasing influence of the Finance and

Commercial Director..... more positively, to improve financial management within the Faculties". (Transcript G, lines 333-336).

Although management in higher education has had a mixed review it was interesting to note the examples of more and more involvement of the 'Centre'.

#### **8.5.4 Approaches to decision making**

Decision making by committee is an aspect of how universities are seen to function:

"I think that, in the areas that I deal with, in some ways, there isn't enough debate. Because maybe we are talking about introducing some new system or procedure and it's.....maybe I've done the initial spadework and the ground work, so I write a report for a committee hoping that it will actually generate some debate and quite often it's just nodded through, so I think in lots of ways it's the opposite of what you're saying here that there is a feeling that those committees are a bit of a nuisance in a sense and we just need to get on with our.....get these things through as quickly as possible". (Transcript A, lines 184-191);

and

"The bits of the Faculty structure which were preserved because they worked well, were particularly to do with quality. So, we've got very strong Faculty Quality Committees. I have 4 Faculty Academic Standards Chairs, who chair those committees and look after the quality in the Faculty. I think that works because a bit of scope for cross fertilisation in that area is a good thing and you get that from Faculty, whereas you wouldn't get it from the School". (Transcript D, lines 39-44);

and

"I think we haven't got to grips with the relationship between XXXX (the senior management planning group) and the academic committees. I really feel that, if we have academic committees, fine, but does XXXX (senior management committee) over-rule everything? Why do we have the committee structure we have – we haven't got that right. If you want to have a managerialist approach, then that's fine. I certainly respect the right of managers to manage and if you want a managerial

approach, fine. But let's not kid on we've got a collegiate approach if we really do have a managerial approach". (Transcript E, lines 435-441);

and

"Universities are strong on committees and we have a formal committee structure". (Transcript G, lines 344-345).

The above quotes tend to suggest that although the committee structure is an integral part of the HEI functioning, there are issue about the extent to which people engage with the process and the relationship between that kind of 'democratic' process and management.

## Conclusions

Management was definitely perceived as an imposition and the lack of budgetary devolution contributed towards that view. However, there were also increasing signs of it, mainly in the interests of efficiency.

## 8.6 Quality

Six HEIs mentioned aspects of quality, usually with an external focus as can be seen from Table 23 below.

A	B	C	D	H	I
League tables	Academics play the system	External accountability as villainous	External determination not always effective	You should aim to do well in quality assessments	Focus on quality assurance rather than quality enhancement
Status of a research-led institution for both staff and students	No culture of quality improvement	Dissatisfaction with bureaucracy	Things better developed because of external stimulation	They are a pain	Issues about what constitutes quality
External push	Lack of openness to considering how things could be done better	Confidence in their abilities to manage their own affairs	Focus on the quality of teaching	Academic staff would have liked to have seen the abolished	
	Lack of pro-activity in quality matters	No time to consider quality enhancement		A lot of teaching quality assessment	
		A busting bureaucracy			

		unit		apparatus was seen as bureaucratic , intrusive and unnecessar y  A recognition that only bad departments don't take them seriously because you can learn from them  Few staff who perform will view it as intrusive	
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**Table 23: Quality as a significant theme in nine HEIs visited**

**Source: Research**

The main themes from the above are:

- External push for quality and attitudes thereof
- Attitudes and work towards quality enhancement
- Dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy of quality audit and assessment

### **8.6.1 External push for quality and attitudes thereof**

From my research it was clear that QAA quality assessments and audits had had an impact. Most staff saw them as hoops to be jumped through rather than a process that might make a difference:

"I think obviously there has been an external push on us so, centrally, we've realised that departments can no longer be allowed to be autonomous. But it's still a tension because a lot of departments feel that they are being imposed on by the centre but I do think it's diminishing and I think that's the reality of having teaching quality assessments and subject reviews and departments don't have any choice. This body is going to come in from the outside and have a look at them and I think there is

a realisation that this is not someone sitting in Senate House all day thinking up these things to make their lives difficult". (Transcript A, lines 87-95);

and

"You can go to people and say "the results of the Diploma are abysmal. It's badly taught, badly resourced .....'. Nobody gives a toss. Suddenly, someone comes in to say 'what are we going to do is a report on Education as a programme' and for that 12 months everyone is interested. When the report is written and says 23 out of 24 or 19 out of 24 the level of interest will return to the previous level. There isn't an institutional learning that says, professionally, we have responsibility for not having recognised these problems in the past. Systematically, what do we need to do to monitor and report on the quality of experience not just this area but if we've missed this for the last few years elsewhere institutionally, what is our systematic response – those questions by and large don't seem to be asked. I have seen a knee-jerk reaction to what has happened with that kind of review, this is what the QAA is saying in this area, it's reacting to an external agenda rather than saying 'well, they are reflecting our interest, we want to assure ourselves that the quality of what we provide is the best it can possibly be within our resources that's available'. That's not a comment that I hear very often anywhere". (Transcript B, lines 243-258);

and

"The villains are outwith the university. This is an important theme – there is a deep irritation and dissatisfaction with the amount of bureaucracy to which the University is subject now. We, on the inside, get the blame for some of this, being involved with quality assurance but the truth is that nearly all of these requirements come from outside, from the Funding Council, from legislative requirements and the university is more or less obliged to pass these things on to staff. When you look at them individually, item by item, I don't think staff really object to the intention behind these but it is the cumulative effect of all this bureaucracy and additional administration which is, indeed, very, very burdensome". (Transcript C, lines 248-257);

and

"I think institutions that were CNAAs probably would (have procedures and processes). I think, by now, they'd be very creaky and out of date because we wouldn't have done

the updating. Another thing that I've learned from industrial quality is that, if you don't tweak the system every so often, everybody just gets very complacent and finds short cuts and starts being very instrumental in the way they use the system but there would be something. I very much doubt whether a place like XXXX ('old' university) would have anything at all". (Transcript D, lines 106-111);

and

"I think that anybody in this institution would want to do what they're doing, well. But if you were to talk about whether that is well measured by the instruments that are used at the moment, like for instance, the RAE, or the subject reviews, whether that audit perspective is comfortable or the answer of whether that is a useful measure of what we do, I think many people would be very cynical". (Transcript I, lines 167-172).

So, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy of quality audit and assessment:

However, there was also a view that change might not have taken place if the external reviews had not taken place:

"If you're exposed to them you should do well in them but they're a pain. If they (academic staff) had been allowed to, they would have liked to have expressed a view that they should have been abolished. I didn't allow them to express that view but there was a demand to express that view, so a lot of the teaching quality apparatus is regarded as bureaucratic, intrusive and unnecessary, on the one side; on the other side there is also a recognition that only bad departments don't take teaching quality seriously and that good departments take teaching quality seriously because you can learn from them, you can improve efficiency by taking teaching quality seriously". (Transcript H, lines 44-52).

Of course, one would still need to question if the changes were beneficial.



### **8.6.2 Attitudes and work towards quality enhancement**

Given the burdensome nature of quality assessment and audit the question which was posed was whether there was room left for any other kind of internal review and particularly one which leads to quality enhancement:

“Rather than waiting to be told by the outside world shouldn't we be forearming ourselves and actually knowing the quality of what we do anyway. In good areas it is good; but in a worrying number of areas I don't think there is that kind of commitment to those processes”. (Transcript B, lines 266-270);

and

“So, it's a real job to maintain quality let alone enhance it. People can – it's sometimes hard to take the argument – they would like to see a greater acknowledgement on the part of the Funding Councils and government and so on that actually, people are doing a marvellous job, struggling to maintain quality rather than actually improve it when the unit of resource has been diminishing as rapidly as it has”. (Transcript C, lines 318-323).

It should be noted that since circa 2002, quality assessments are seen as much less burdensome.

### **Conclusions**

So, external quality assessments and audits featured extensively in discussions with six of the HEIs visited. Generally, staff found them burdensome and in some instances they were done for compliance sake rather than any benefit that was seen to be derived from the process. This was not universally the case, however, and some institutions were able to see that some improvements had come about as a result of the process. However, what was noticeable in the discussions was the lack of a quality culture in the institutions visited. That is, that higher education institutions were so taken up with the business of preparing for external assessment that there was little time left for the development of their own approaches to both quality assurance and quality enhancement.

## 8.7 Change

As can be seen from Table 24 below the issue of change arose in five HEIs. The main issue to come out of this theme were:

- Relationship between change and external initiatives
- The nature of the organisation and its attitude towards change
- Role of vice-chancellors in implementing change

A	B	C	F	I
Change has come about as a result of external pressure	Prudent and cautious	VC implemented all sorts of change	Risk-averse	Change through discourse
Relationship between change and external initiatives	More concerned with its history than its future	Culture change had taken place	Only calculated risks taken	External quality impetus has created change
	Risk-averse	Relationship between speed of feedback and change	Not a lot of turnover in staff	
	We don't have to change if we don't want to		Has a local authority legacy	
	Manage change badly		Resistance to change	
	Seeking the perfect answer		Some inflexibility on the part of staff	

**Table 24: Change as a significant theme in nine HEIs visited**  
**Source: Research**

### 8.7.1 Relationship between change and external initiatives

This issue relates to that discussed in section 8.6.1 on the external push aspect of quality in that change has taken place in HEIs and a lot of that has been externally derived to a large extent:

“In all honesty, I think it has been the external pressures that have started the ball rolling. I don't think anybody would really have thought of..... really, of introducing the quite comprehensive systems we now have if there hadn't been this whole regime of inspections. I know in the CNAA universities they had to do this because that was their external validation body. I don't think there was the incentive in the old universities which had their own degree awarding powers. I don't know, I

don't have a lot of experience of other universities but my impression is that we wouldn't have the panoply of systems we now have in place without the external pressures". (Transcript A, lines 96-104);

and

"So, this unit is relatively new and I suppose that was external pressure". (Transcript, lines 398-399);

and

"I came in just as institutional audit was coming in which very quickly turned into subject review. I mean, I've been here through the subject review era and there's obviously been and RAE. Clearly, if you begin to look at HEIs as an industry, the efficiency and the sheer economic efficiency measures of the relationship against outputs demonstrates that there has been considerable change. Whether that change is the culture comes back to what you see as culture. But of course it has changed the way things are, it has changed the way people think. I mean, I do think that we're output driven but that's a rational response to the indicators that are there and not a change in what people value necessarily. It's just a rational response to what they have to do". (Transcript I, lines 149-159).

### **8.7.2 The nature of the organisation and its attitude towards change**

Generally speaking, the HEIs visited would describe themselves as risk-averse:

"Something in the time that I've been here that's been radical? I don't think there has actually been a radical review of the administration in the time that I've been here. There have been changes here and there but and there's been no fundamental changes really". (Transcript A, lines 399-402);

and

" ..... as an institution the kinds of words that seem to surface for me are: research, but there are also a number of words like prudent, cautious, traditional. We're back to that kind of lexicon of words and expressions that suggest ..... in some areas it's

fairly backward looking, proud of its history and perhaps too conscious about its history and less concerned about its future". (Transcript B, lines 97-102);

and

"It goes back to what I said about the University being a bit conservative. Some of the academics are quite conservative, not necessarily innovative. I mean, not everybody is, of course. But I guess we've probably got fewer of those that we perhaps ought to have probably because until relatively recently, the community is quite stable – there's not a lot of turnover". (Transcript F, lines 169-174).

One of my interviewees who was aware of the EFQM Excellence Model told me that she had often wondered why the Model had not been adopted more in the higher education sector. The conclusion she had reached was that academic staff were used to questioning everything. So, her solution to the problem of implementation was to find ways of effecting change without it being identified as such:

"I have thought quite a lot about why there hasn't been more of a take-up of quality management ideas generally. They seem to have taken it up more enthusiastically in schools, than in higher education, primary schools, who've won national quality awards. Which is strange really. I think there is something about the academic mind. We are much better at criticising and seeing the negatives than we are at saying this is a really good idea and we could make it work. I know this from my consulting. I worked with some very bright people, engineers. I did a lot of work with Hewlett-Packard, the computer people and I used to feel like a real wet blanket at meetings because they had that kind of 'starry eyed' enthusiasm, they were more prepared to pick ideas in an enthusiastic way which I think academics, almost by training, are not prepared to do. So, you've got a much harder job to sell them methodologies and approaches. Because it's always on the one hand or the other hand, that's the way we are. That's why we do education and not training. If we were training, we would teach you all methodology. We're educating you, so we'll teach you X and Y, tell you the pros and cons and make your own mind up. So, that does make it quite a challenge, I think, to sell any of these things in an academic environment. So, I think the secret is almost, with some colleagues, to give them the pill without letting them know that they are swallowing it". (Transcript D, lines 158-177).

### **8.7.3 Role of vice-chancellors in implementing change**

Another theme which came through my research was that of effecting and responding to change. In this area there did seem to be a divide between those HEIs that saw themselves as effectively managed or led and those not and so there seemed to be a correlation between the two. So, those that felt that leadership was discharged well, felt too that change was managed in a constructive way:

“I think the previous vice-chancellor who was here for quite a long time, he was here for 14 years, was a Scot but he came from the States and brought a whole lot of experience of the States with him and turned the University upside down. All sorts of fundamental changes”. (Transcript C, lines 117-120).

## **Conclusions**

My interviewees would by and large describe the institutions within which they work as cautious and risk-averse in that most of the changes that could be identified coming about as a result of external pressure and initiatives. However, there were too, examples of how change had been effected.

### **8.8 Views of students**

All nine HEIs mentioned students. Whilst this may be because I asked a question about students I am also sure that it would not have been possible to have such a conversation about the culture of HEIs without such an important element coming out. What was of interest was the way in which students were perceived.

The themes coming from an analysis of the transcripts were:

- Students as a nuisance for some and seen as important by others
- The student experience
- Students as customers as an increasingly accepted concept in higher education

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Seen as a nuisance for some; seen as important by others	<p>Don't care about the student experience</p> <p>Treated with contempt</p> <p>Need to think about retention and so get away from elitist academic ideas</p> <p>60% of funding comes from undergraduate programmes but you wouldn't know it</p> <p>They think of themselves as customers</p> <p>Range of services</p> <p>Need to get a thrill out of seeing students learn</p>	<p>Students increasingly viewed as customers</p> <p>Students paying has changed things – emphasis on student rights and entitlements</p>	<p>Emphasis on the student experience</p>	<p>Students seen as £notes</p> <p>Student's fault if they don't do well</p>	<p>Student oriented</p> <p>Student experience seen as important</p> <p>A local university with strong community links</p> <p>Solid teaching university</p> <p>Research &amp; Consultancy do not override teaching and care for students</p> <p>Key people involved in delivering the student learning experience who are invited to awards' ceremonies</p>	<p>Seen as a 'nuisance'</p> <p>Other staff highly committed to teaching</p> <p>Different types of students viewed in different ways</p> <p>Degree ceremonies not particularly well attended</p> <p>Students = income - Students as customers</p> <p>Effect of league tables</p>	<p>Most staff have a positive orientation towards their students</p> <p>A lot of pride is taken in teaching</p> <p>Most staff treat teaching and learning seriously</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> highest number of subjects awarded 'excellent' in TQA between 1993 and 2001</p> <p>Can provide a better environment for your students if you take TQA seriously</p> <p>Students make positive statements about their experience here</p>	<p>What students are buying or being sold</p> <p>Customer vis-à-vis professional practice</p> <p>Student feedback as a means of finding out how what's on offer is viewed</p>

**Table 25: Views of students as a significant theme in nine HEIs visited**

**Source: Research**

### **8.8.1 Students as a nuisance for some and seen as important by others**

How students were perceived ranged enormously both within institutions and from institution to institution:

".....it varies very greatly from department to department. I suspect there are some where, if not seen as a nuisance, at least are seen as a necessary evil because they have to have these students and I can't think of individual departments, that's an impression but in some areas that perhaps students were just there and you had to teach them because you had to do research but I do think there are departments

where the students are seen as very important and have always been, staff have always made themselves available and concerned about them". (Transcript A, lines 139-145);

and

"So, there is a department here – I think it's XXX – where they can offer three times as many places – they don't have to look at non-traditional entrants. They just get hoards of three and four grade A levels – they are just swamped. Because of that, they never respond to applicants, they're rude to parents, they don't care about the student experience when they come to visit this institution and actually, they don't really care that the way that they treat those prospective students actually affects people's outside view of the whole University". (Transcript B, lines 164-170);

and

"We obtain feedback on all modules. There are core topics mentioned. There is also a whole student experience survey. They mention in the Student Handbook what changes they have made as a result of feedback from students. We have strong links with the Students' Union". (Transcript D, lines 4-7);

and

"In this institution, I'm not sure that the students are perceived as well as they used to be". (Transcript E, lines 135-136);

and

"We're very student-centred. And for whatever reason – and I'm not sure there has ever been a deliberate policy until now to make that, so it just seems to be part of how the University evolved. We're quite local in the sense that more than half the students came from the area. But then the XX is very parochial anyway, and it is seen as a local University with community links which are quite strong". (Transcript F, lines 22-26).

and

"Again, I think it's the same way. I think it's very variable. A lot of people will view them as a bit of a nuisance, you know, got to do some teaching, got to have a tutorial,

can't do my research. Whereas others are highly committed to teaching, really enjoy teaching, value it and value the students very much". (Transcript G, lines 151-154).

There did seem to be a different view expressed by the representatives of the 'old' and 'new' universities in their thinking about students with the latter demonstrating more of a student-oriented approach to thinking about them.

### **8.8.2 The student experience**

The student experience is the main focus for the HE Academy (HE Academy website) and so it was interesting to note how the HEIs in my sample viewed this matter:

"One of my concerns is that at recruitment time, students are seen as pound notes. And I get really annoyed at the fact that people are recruited because we have to meet numbers and targets rather than because the programme that they've been recruited on to is going to be of benefit to them as an individual". (Transcript E, lines 298-301);

and

"We obtain feedback on all modules. There are core topics mentioned. There is also a whole student experience survey. They mention in the Student Handbook what changes they have made as a result of feedback from students. We have strong links with the Students' Union". (Transcript D, lines 4-7);

and

"And different types of students will be regarded in different ways. There's a huge difference between a 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate who is basically being taught in fairly large groups and dealing with a postgraduate research student on a one to one basis. What an academic may gain out of dealing with those types of students will vary enormously". (Transcript G, lines 167-171);

and



“Students make very positive statements about the experience of having been here. So, we are able to include that in the Prospectus – it’s what students have said”. (Transcript H, lines 109-111);

and

“We have all the proper feedback processes. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t. Again it’s immensely complex, I think. I mean, clearly we have a process to find out what students think. That sort of process works through staff/student committees and end of term analysis. We feed back into annual reports and spread-based practice. We ensure that we do these things as best we can and respond to problems and I think we have a very consistent approach and on the whole, that’s borne out by subject reviews which have been very good”. (Transcript I, lines 215-219).

### **8.8.3 Students as customers as an increasingly accepted concept in higher education**

There was more than one HEI that adopted this way of looking at students:

“I think things have changed. Not so very many years ago, I think if someone had introduced the concept of the student as customer, people would have looked very askance at that, and felt that it was quite inappropriate analogy and I think that, to a degree, is still true. I think that, like all analogies, it can be pushed too far. But I think there is a greater awareness that, in a real sense students are customers, that they and their parents can choose, that it is up to us to be aware of their needs, to try to respond to them quickly. I think the speed of feedback and the speed of change is something that has moved significantly. Students want it now, sort of thing. It’s not enough for them that, if they make recommendations about a possible change, it will feed through and benefit the next generation of students. There’s a greater appetite for ‘we want the change to take place now’. Of course, there are difficulties with that because, quite apart from anything else, student views are volatile and what one year says, you very often introduce them and the next year’s want it to go back to something more like what we had before, There are those kinds of problems. There is understandably a greater acceptance of a customer orientation”. (Transcript C, lines 265-279);

and

“ I mean I think it was already starting and I don't think the introduction of the £1,000 fee made a huge amount of difference. I mean, it was already moving towards students are customers, paying customers, in effect”. (Transcript G, lines 172-174).

However, that take on students was not universal:

“And conversations come up “they think of themselves as customers”. But it has cost them £5000 to be here. What do they get for that money? They talk about their methods like dictation and giving them some handouts. I suppose that almost encapsulates it for me. If I'm not thinking how can I make this more rich and more variable and interesting? How can I engage with these people that I've never met before on this particular course or module? I want to see the spark of excitement, not just because of my subject but because they're learning”. (Transcript B, lines 458-465);

and

“I think the issue is what are you selling and who has the capacity to judge that. I think that what you are selling is opportunity, but the students think that what you are selling is output and therefore you go back to user wants and needs. So, I think we're into troubled times really because of the expectations and the difficulties that, even if the bill goes through tonight, that people will still not be paying enough to enable us to manage institutions in such a way as to fulfil their expectations. They're still not paying enough to buy a Mini and they are expecting a Rolls-Royce, so there is an issue about just those sort of basics and of how to manage expectations and that kind of internal thing, like physical surroundings. You know, what do they expect to be given to them? And whether, in fact, they appreciate quality and whether they actually looking to be entertained. I'm a bit sceptical of whether students are always knowledgeable as consumers. It's like the balance between doctors and patients. It's the same when you get into any professional area. There is a need to understand what professional practice is about. If you get in to that, then the notion of customer is a different thing. The day-to-day control that some parents are exercising is incredible”. (Transcript I, lines 288-304).

## Conclusions

This view of students as customers is one to which I will return in the next chapter as customer results is an integral part of the Excellence Model. However, it is a view that has

been sternly rejected by many in the HE sector who have described in a range of ways but most recently students as junior partners in the learning process. In chapter one I referred to the confusion in HE about who the external customers of a HE institution might be. Elton (2005) makes the distinction between customers (persons who buy), consumers (persons who purchase goods or services) and clients (persons who seek the advice of a professional).

## 8.9 History, status and reputation

There were four HEIs where this theme appeared as a significant factor. I have included status and reputation to mean the same thing in that the institution's status derives from a positive reputation.

The mains issue coming through this them were:

- history as a positive and a negative
- importance of reputation

A	C	E	G
Longevity	Confident	A chequered, anomalous history	Strong research university but not as strong as it sometimes thinks it is
'Red Brick'	Reputation and standing important to it's sense of identity	Struggling to find an identity	
Traditional			
Money and prestige	Different Perspectives	History has militated against the institution	Struggling at the moment
Superior	High Standards	Use of language and jargon which work against student understanding	Big, traditional, civic university
Slippage	1 <sup>st</sup> Class education		Arrogant and over-sure of itself
			Anonymous – can hide in such a big institution
			Comparing itself with its peers it seems lower down the pecking order

**Table 26: History, status and reputation as a significant theme in nine HEIs Visited**  
**Source: Research**

### 8.9.1 History as a positive and a negative

History could be seen as both a positive factor and a negative one:

“We also have quite extensive art collections. We are an institution that, over the years, has quite a lot of endowments given to us and there was certainly a policy, before my time, certainly in the 50’s and 60’s to buy fine furniture and works of art to go into our collection”. (Transcript A, lines 300-303);

and

“There’s still a slight feeling of the glories of the 60’s and 70’s and then actually our campus began to get really run down”. (Transcript A, lines 275-276);

and

“We are, of course, a very old university..... (Transcript C, line 7);

and

“And that’s a mixed blessing, I mean, the tradition and history is marvellous but I suppose it can make the place at least to outsiders the place can seem a bit stuffy, snobby, elitist and so on”. (Transcript C, lines 8-10);

and

“It’s striving to seek out a niche for itself really and I think circumstances and modern history have militated very badly against it in the way it has been developed”. (Transcript E, lines 47-49);

and

“It has a well established reputation as a big, traditional, civic university “. (Transcript G, Line 21);

and

“It is a strong research university but it’s maybe not as strong as it sometimes thinks it is. It needs to maintain and build the reputation so it has to project that to the outside world. And then work hard inside to make sure the reality is close to what is put forward, because at the moment we’re struggling a bit but that will change over the next few years”. (Transcript G, lines 3-8);

### **8.9.2 Importance of reputation**

All of the HEIs who mentioned reputation were aware of the importance of the factor in how they were perceived. This correlates too with the findings from the printed materials where all the twenty HEIs in my sample mentioned their reputation in some way or other. An important element in this assessment was the production of league tables which allowed HEIs to identify where they were in the pecking order:

“Well, I think it’s the league table dip, as it were and that’s largely come about partly through slipping behind others on research, partly because we didn’t do well in a lot of the teaching assessments we had and we sort of went.....certainly slipped down the tables”. (Transcript A, lines 16-19);

and

“People know that it has high academic standards. On the whole, I guess they are rather happy to be in a place like that, not a bad thing for their CV and so on to go to a university with that kind of reputation”. (Transcript C, lines 231-233);

and

“We’re up there on a lot of other measures, crude measures, purely because of size. I mean research power which is one measure is really a function of size, size and quality. We are a high quality research institution but in terms of the percentages of researchers in 5 and 5\* rated developments it’s a lot lower than a significant number of other institutions and ones we would consider as our peers. I suppose it’s quite interesting in that this may always have been the case but in the last 10/15 years increasingly there have been this kind of measurement and increasingly we have been able to compare ourselves with other institutions in a more quantitative way. So, maybe we’ve always been further down the pecking order than we perceived. Maybe now it’s just becoming more apparent and clear. It maybe takes time to

accept that within an institution, I guess, and do something about it". (Transcript G, lines 44-55).

## **Conclusions**

History, status and reputation appear to be significant in the way in which these HEIs think about themselves and how they portray themselves to an external market. However, the introduction of league tables has provided additional information by which they and others can judge them and this does seem to have had an effect in some instances (HEIs A and G).

### **8.10 Chapter conclusions**

My conclusion from this analysis of the interviews conducted with staff from nine different higher education institutions is that there is such a phenomenon as a higher education culture which is made up of elements like a devolved and fragmented structure, and underlying values like the concept and practice of academic autonomy and collegiality, the concept and practice of leadership and management, approaches to quality and accountability, attitudes towards change, views of students, the impact of history, status and reputation.

#### **8.10.1 Structure**

From my research there would appear to be a fragmented structure and nature of higher education institutions. In particular, mention was made of little joined-up functioning taking place either between academic units or between academia and its administration or support functions. The devolved and divided nature of HE culture was a consistent theme and one that does not augur well for any institution-wide initiative like, for example, the application of the Excellence Model. It is always possible, of course, for an initiative to be adopted by one unit with the potential of that then being taken up by another. However, such is the fragmented nature of HEIs that this is unlikely to happen as there is such an individual mindset that one would not be confident that a mechanism for communication between departments exists. The reference in HEI B to the description of the HEI as three hundred corner shops is indicative of the kind of fragmentation to which I refer.

The fact that there is little joined-up functioning in the HEIs is a feature that is going to get in the way of any change process as there is often neither a culture of managing the organisation on an institution-wide basis nor is there much opportunity for each of the functions and/or departments to work together and so any mutual understanding towards a shared objective is

going to be difficult to achieve. I am aware of the argument that the whole point about the 'herding of cats' is that it leads to diversity and joint-up functioning at local level, while heroic management leads to conformity and joined-up functioning at institutional level.

Throughout the course of the interviews I have identified people working in small groups or units, largely functional. In terms of the Excellence Model this could be helpful where there is a belief in the need to empower people, to facilitate working together in teams and encouraging improvement activities, all of which are best achieved through smaller teams of people both functional and cross-functional. So, there is an opportunity through this aspect of what I have identified as a feature of HEI culture to develop such a way of doing things. However, for this to succeed a facilitating framework needs to be in place whereby staff would see the benefits from such an approach, be supported and be clear about what is expected of them.

**8.10.2 Academic autonomy**

After 'views of students' this was the most common theme that arose from the interviews. From my research the concept of academic autonomy seems to come from a theory of professionalism, according to which, the abstract knowledge and complex skills possessed by professionals make it difficult for the layperson to judge the quality of their services. Consequently, to protect the public interest and ensure that high standards of quality are maintained, professionals are granted certain privileges, like restricted entry through education and certification requirements, and the right of self-regulation. In exchange for these privileges, society expects professionals to be committed to high moral and ethical standards, and to subordinate personal gain to the public interest when the two conflict.

Hall (1968) provides one of the few studies in the field of sociology that has attempted to measure professional attitudes and behaviours at the individual level, through the use of the Hall Professionalism Scale. The items included in the Scale relate to five commonly cited characteristics of professionals:

- Professional community affiliation. This item refers to the extent to which a person is actively involved in the professional community
- Social obligation. This refers to a social obligation or commitment to serve the public interest.
- Belief in self-regulation. This refers to an obligation on the part of the profession to regulate the quality of the services provided.

- Professional dedication. This reflects a sense of calling to one's field and the belief that you would want to do the work even if fewer extrinsic rewards were available.
- Autonomy demands. This refers to the professional desire to be free to make decisions about their work. As such external pressures that conflict with professional judgment are the antithesis of autonomy.

So, how does this apply to higher education? I think it is fair to say that all of the above apply to academic staff in higher education institutions. However, what is interesting is that other professional staff in HE do not seem to be afforded quite the same professional status. You just do not hear of Directors of HR or Finance talking about their professional autonomy:

"And I think that is a very telling difference in the perception of what academic staff can do and what administrators can do. But also, as administrators we would never dream of saying, 'no, we're not doing that because we would see it as part of our job whereas the academics say 'we're not doing that because that's not part of our job, it's just some training you want us to do'. Our job is teaching and research". (Transcript A, lines 483-488).

There is a large number of very well qualified people who work in higher education who are not academics and there is no doubt that they are perceived differently in terms of their professionalism:

"I guess within academics themselves as individuals, there is a tendency to be confident of your ability because by definition you are an expert in your own field and I speak as someone who has a PhD but didn't follow the academic pathway. I have a PhD and certainly I used to see that in myself, that confidence in your own ability because potentially you are number one in your particular area or certainly one of a very small number, so I think institutions that have a lot of academics in it are inevitably going to have that sort of confidence/arrogance because that's within the individuals who make up the institution. I think also, any organisation that's on the cutting edge of research and therefore attracts positive publicity for major developments is bound to develop a degree of confidence, an inner confident organisation as a result of research and development". (Transcript G, lines 22-33)

Another aspect of being a professional is the ideal of their serving the public interest. Some of the observations made in the course of my interviews would suggest that this is not that easy:



“Those values are fine on the surface and some of those do definitely operate, pervade the institution. But some of the others don’t and it’s very much people guided by their own objectives. Again, it goes back to ‘an academic is an expert in his own field’. Where is their loyalty? I think a lot of people say and I think it’s true that their first loyalty is to their specialism, their subject, then their academic unit and the institution comes pretty low down the scale. You can understand that, in a way, they are academics operating in their own field, that there are networks that may well go outside the institution to their subject disciplines. So, I think there is a lot of self-motivation for their own objectives, going on below the surface”. (Transcript G, lines 131-140)

So, (academic) autonomy is seen as a key professional right and responsibility but is not one that seems to be applied to other professional groups within higher education. This kind of dichotomy had led to a separation of functions if not academic units to a point where staff relate more to the unit or department which they are a part of rather than the institution by which they are employed:

“.....they would also care where XXXX fits in league tables and what’s said about XXXX nationally and some of them would have been at XXXX for 30 years so they have a strong attachment to it but I think I know for many people in the xx Department their attachment is to the xx Department and not to the university”. (Transcript H, lines 172-176).

Williams and Loder (1990) state that it is well established that many academics believe that their prime loyalty is to their academic discipline and that accountability to peers within the discipline ought to be the chief consideration. They argue, however, that there is also a social and political accountability which takes account of the views of students and others who contribute to the cost of education. This means that quality and accountability are inextricably linked. Oona O’Neill in her Radio 4 Reith Lectures on ‘A Question of Trust’ discussed the impact of increased accountability processes on professional practice and says:

“The new accountability is widely experienced not just as changing but I think as distorting the proper aims of professional practice and indeed as damaging professional pride and integrity. Much professional practice used to centre on interaction with those whom professionals serve: patients and pupils, students and families in need. Now there is less time to do this because everyone has to record the details of what they do

and compile the evidence to protect themselves against the possibility of not only plausible, but of far-fetched complaints". (O'Neill, 2002).

Regulation is a difficult and emotive concept for academic communities that value above all other values, personal and institutional autonomy (the right of individuals and institutions to decide how to perform their core activities) and academic freedom (the absence of outside interference, censure or obstacles in the pursuit and practice of academic work). But these academic principles must be positioned against the principle of accountability. Academics are resistant to the idea of regulation because it is seen as an imposed managerial, administrative and bureaucratic device to control and limit their personal autonomy by increasing their professional accountability. This makes it extremely difficult to position the idea of regulation in ways which will secure a sense of professional ownership. Public confidence in the capacity of an institution to regulate itself must depend on confidence in the skills and attitudes of the professional communities within the institution.

An issue that also arose was the nature of the profession that academic staff were engaged in. It was clear that for the 'old' universities this is research and that teaching comes a very poor second. This was not the case in the 'new' universities where teaching was seen as the primary function of academic staff and scholarship and/or research contributing towards that function. From my research it was clear that in the former kinds of instances and institutions students could be perceived as a bit of a nuisance and teaching was a role to be tolerated rather than one to be enjoyed and taken seriously and one from which there were few rewards. This raises questions about the basis on which academic staff are recruited. Often, staff are recruited as researchers in the first instance with a bit of teaching added on. In this case, such staff are inevitably going to view teaching as a lesser priority than that of research; this position is then likely to be reinforced by other academic staff if not by the culture of the institution itself. This does create a problem for the quality of offerings to students. Whilst teaching quality assessments may indicate that all is well in that area there are questions about the extent to which the student view has really been taken into account. There has been a view in higher education that the student view was not of much worth – after all, what did they know about educative processes? I have heard it argued that it may be some time down the line before students understand fully the significance of what was taught them. Whilst this is almost certainly true it is still possible for students to evaluate how well they are being taught – that is, does the teaching facilitate their learning? Does the way in which they are dealt with make them feel that staff are interested in their learning? Elton (2006) holds the view that neither academics nor managers have got it right: that academics cling to unevaluated traditions and within these on the whole do a good job, but they largely ignore the need for change in changing

circumstances. Managers often try to impose inappropriate change, derived from commercial practices, and so frequently try to change what is good (e.g. collegiality) and fail to change what is bad (e.g. the dominance of research).

### **8.10.3 Leadership**

Leadership too is an important outcome of this research in terms of how it is perceived as well as how it manifests itself. There were mixed views on leadership but examples of more and less effective approaches were provided:

#### **On the positive side:**

- The provision of a clear sense of direction (HEI H) as can be seen from the drive towards increasing activity in research; and
- Staff with a range of management and leadership experience (HEI C); and
- Clarity of strategic direction and in putting objectives in place to achieve the appropriate end (HEI D)

#### **On the negative side:**

- A lack of responsiveness to poor performance and/or attitude (HEI A) where academic staff are not challenged if they choose not to do something; and
- A lack of drive (HEI B). This HEI was in the middle of a major change process when I spoke with my interviewee and his perspective was that there was a distinct lack of drive to move the process on and to make clear to staff what was happening and the impact that the change would have on them; and
- Not taking on board the views of staff in determining a strategic direction (HEI E); and
- A lack of critical self-evaluation that would enable the institution to position itself appropriately (HEI G)

I think the above analysis demonstrates the difficult issues around leadership within higher education institutions with the more traditional universities having a stronger concept and

practice of both academic autonomy and collegiality impacting on the way in which leaders are viewed and seen to function. However, there is no doubt too that a change is taking place in the way in which leaders are perceived in higher education. The Lambert Review (2003), for example, says that the vision and management skills of the vice-chancellor, more than any other individual, determine stalemate situation. To effect change now, it would seem that both academic staff and academic leaders must realise that positive change can only come about if both sides acknowledge the imperative to cooperate. My research suggests that the changes put in place post-Jarratt have had much less effect than they should have had. There is no doubt that change was needed but it seems that the top-down approaches to leadership that have been adopted by those in positions of leadership in the higher education sector seems not to have had the desired effect in making higher education institutions more effective and efficient.

#### **8.10.4 Management**

Management was seen as an alternative to academic autonomy and freedom and as such was perceived in a rather negative way. The aspects of management which arose in the interviews were managerialism, control from the centre and approaches to decision making.

In higher education managerialism can be seen as a substitute for a relationship of trust between government and universities, that is, trust in the ability of HEIs to broadly govern themselves (Trow, 1994). It is, then, used as a pejorative term and has two manifestations. These are soft and hard managerialism. The soft concept sees managerial effectiveness as an important element in the provision of higher education of high quality at lowest cost and is focussed on the idea of improving the efficiency of the existing institutions; the hard concept elevates institutional and systems management to a dominant position in higher education and argues that higher education must be reshaped and reformed by the introduction of management systems which then become a continuing force ensuring the steady improvement in the provision of higher education. In higher education it is possible to identify both.

With increasing signs of managerialism, more control from the centre was evidenced in my research. Whilst some interviewees felt that this was a necessary response to external requirements it was also seen as interference and getting in the way of academic autonomy. Equally, I was surprised in the degree of acceptance from my interviewees of the need for more management, particularly in response to the increasing demands from external quality assessment and audit.

Decision making by committee is often seen as symbolic aspect of higher education, reflecting a particular consensual culture. However, in this research it was also viewed as a mean of inhibiting debate and effective decision-making.

#### **8.10.5 Quality and accountability**

One of the problems associated with accountability is that it does not fit easily with the concept of academic autonomy described earlier in this chapter and so one gets the following kinds of attitudes:

“I think it’s a failure to get the balance right between the needs of academic freedom but taking that forward, that any kind of accountability is unwarranted. Any kind of accountability implies control by others and that in some way I will suffer in terms of my scholarship or my research. In fact, its unwarranted interference”. (Transcript B, lines 86-89).

Quality is important in terms of value for money and both staff and student satisfaction. However, responsibility for the determination of quality has been taken on board by external agencies. There was evidence in my research that the external accountability processes of quality assessment and audit have got in the way of quality enhancement and of institutions taking responsibility therefore and that HEIs have found quality assessment and audit processes so burdensome that it has stopped them from having both the time and resources if not the will to undertake any additional quality enhancement processes. As a result, what we have in our HEIs is a culture of compliance rather than one of quality improvement or enhancement. Yorke (1996) says that if a (quality) process is established from the starting-point of accountability, then it contains no strong implications for enhancement and this perspective is borne out by my research.

Another factor in thinking about quality is to consider the quality of which function in higher education. My research suggests that academic staff in the ‘old’ universities are often seen as more interested in their research than in their teaching responsibilities which can often be seen as getting in the way of their research. An additional attraction for academic staff is that research activity is not as controlled and monitored as teaching and so there is more freedom. It is true that every four years a research assessment exercise is set up to determine the value of research being undertaken and to enable the Funding Councils to distribute their research funds. As such, it is not a quality instrument; its purpose is to rank, not to provide an acceptable threshold. On the other hand, teaching is a function that

everyone and his grandmother knows something about. As such, and perhaps also because students are involved, reams are produced on the quality of teaching. Also, academic staff view the quality of their research through the eyes of their peers, through papers in journals and at conferences whereas the quality of teaching is viewed through both their peers *and* through the eyes of their students. This has become a greater issue in recent times as students become more demanding and discerning about the educational service for which they believe they are paying. I believe that these differences place a greater quality and accountability 'burden' on staff in relation to teaching quality.

Historically, academics have operated in a bit of functional 'bubble', not accountable to anyone. The notion of accountability is a strong component in HEIs in that they are being made to be accountable through external assessment processes that have been the case since the 1980s when this kind of thinking with respect to different aspects of the public sector including higher education came into being. This has resulted in some dissatisfaction with and criticisms of the academic (teaching and research) assessment systems with academic staff feeling that they are no longer trusted to do a good job.

There is also the question of quality of support services which is an aspect of external assessment and audit which receive little attention. There is, therefore, a need to have some framework within which these services can be improved too. So, my view is that this factor functions as a hindering factor because there is little or no incentive or space for staff in HEIs to give a lot of thought to quality assurance and quality enhancement processes with the burden of external accountability a constant factor. Equally, although the Model offers a holistic approach to quality that should be a helping factor, there seems to be little consideration in HEIs of the quality of support services within higher education institutions with the focus on academic areas largely as a result of external scrutiny.

So, if a culture of quality enhancement or improvement is to be inculcated (and there would be many who would endorse the need) a re-thinking of academic approaches to their work is needed, particularly where there is a focus on departmental and disciplinary units and structures. There are examples in higher education of researchers from different discipline areas working on the same area but there is little or no incentive nor encouragement to work together in a holistic manner. We need, in higher education, to do better at talking across the functional academic and support lines. Failure to do so will result in the fragmentation identified and described in this research to increase and worsen and so any change process or mechanism will be repelled as a result.

Also for such a development (a culture of quality improvement) to take place a more holistic approach to organisational activity needs to take place with all aspects of the organisation working together. This does not seem to be happening currently but is a position with which the use of the Model could assist given its claim to be a comprehensive approach to quality.

#### **8.10.6 Change**

Change and the lack of internally derived change was a common theme too. It was clear that change had taken place. However, it was clear that most of this change had been externally derived by initiatives driven by the Funding Councils and by the QAA. Whilst these had generated the accountability outcomes desired by the QAA, arguably in the public interest, there are questions about the extent to which they had any real impact on the way in which the institutions managed their approach to the facilitating of a quality culture. There appeared to be little sense of ownership of the quality assessments and audits which were seen largely as imposed on them from the outside and so they were processes that they went through because they had to. These processes were seen as burdensome and a 'pain' and were unlikely to effect much by way of positive quality outcomes. It is interesting to note that after fifteen years, there has been little evaluation of the effectiveness of these imposed changes.

So, the impression given by most HEIs is one of presenting positive images of higher education – they have been around for a long time and are doing all right, thank you very much. Whilst this may be a positive image to convey it is also indicative of a culture that is resistant to change. If HEIs have been around for a long time is there any need for them to change? This is not to deny that over the centuries that universities have changed but to recognise that their intrinsic motivation is not to. This point links in with the section on change in this chapter where HEIs were seen to be largely risk-averse and not associated with change unless it was initiated from outside the HEI.

Some good things have come about as a result of the external initiatives on quality. This came through my research where some of the people interviewed made it clear that some of the changes which had taken place would have been unlikely to have happened without the external drive. However, there was also evidence to suggest that what does not exist in higher education institutions a culture of change.

### **8.10.7 History, status and reputation**

History was seen as both a negative and positive aspect of higher education institutions with some of the 'old' universities feeling that it could be a bit of a burden whereby outsiders viewed these institutions as a bit elitist and loft. On the other hand some of the 'new' HEIs mentioned history in an attempt to give them some gravitas and substance. So, history was a common theme and a proxy for status and quality with the 'old' universities portraying these credentials as one might expect but also the 'new' universities were keen to establish their historical traditions.

At the same time reputation was an important issue for a number of the sample HEIs interviewed. Of course, this is not to say that it was not an issue for the others as can be seen from the analysis of the written materials where reputation was a theme for all twenty HEIs.

### **8.10.8 How students are perceived**

The question of who the customers of higher education are is one that needs clarifying. If an HEI is not able to say for whom it is providing services then how can it be clear about its role and purpose. There is a view that the aim of higher education is to provide services to society (Harris, 2005). This position allows the HEI and the individuals that make it up to avoid accountability thinking. After all, who can consult with the whole of society to evaluate if the services on offer are effective or not? So, I do not want just to argue here that students are customers of the HEI (although I believe that this way of thinking about students is helpful to students in the way in which we manage their learning experience) but rather that higher education institutions have not even come to any conclusions about who it is providing services to, that is, to adopt an external perspective on what is being done rather than an internal one. This kind of lack of clarity and positioning stops HEIs from moving forward and perhaps being able to derive benefit from an alternative way of doing things.

Wallace (1999) argued that there was a difference between a customer and consumer of higher education services and that this distinction was one that was often not recognised. As such, he argued that students as customers had a responsibility to attend classes, to study, complete projects, take tests and so on. In this way customers have responsibilities too. The issue then becomes one of coming to agreement with the customers on what those responsibilities are. This approach is reflected in the increasing practice of learning contracts with students which make explicit respective responsibilities. This seems to me to be a very helpful way of thinking about the relationship between teaching staff and students where



there are respective responsibilities rather than a one way street that suggests that students have no contribution to make to the outcome of their educational experience.

In the course of this research a member of staff I interviewed told me that she did not hold with student feedback. After all, she said, she had got different feedback from different students with them describing her approach in different ways. As such, she had decided that there was no validity in the feedback. What she had failed to understand was that the difference in feedback was *exactly* the issue. The fact that students do learn in different ways was exactly the point that she needed to understand to make her a more effective teacher. For me, there is an enormous irony about the very people who are trying to inculcate in students a reflective approach to their studies who appear to find this difficult to do for themselves.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusions**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

In chapter three on research methodology I described four different research methods to test out the applicability of the Excellence Model to higher education. These were:

- Desk research using the criteria of the Model (see section 4.6.1) to test out the applicability of the Model in terms of the contours of higher education, that is, if they fitted the outcomes of which are described in chapter five
- Self-assessment (participant observation) using the workshop approach described in chapter 2, section 2.7 (see section 4.6.2) to test out the applicability of the Model in terms of the contours of higher education, the outcomes of which are described in chapter six
- Analysis of the printed materials of twenty HEIs (see section 4.9.1.1) to assess the cultural elements of higher education (if they exist) and the extent to which these hinder or help the use of the Model, the outcomes of which are described in chapter seven
- Interviews with members of staff in nine of the twenty HEIs in the sample (see section 4.9.1.2) to assess the cultural elements of higher education (if they exist) and the extent to which they hinder or help the use of the Model, the outcomes of which are described in chapter eight

At the end of chapter five I concluded that the Model was applicable in that the criterion parts could be used to find evidence within higher education. However, there were several issues about:

- Academic staff and their commitment to their discipline rather than to the institution
- How leadership was perceived within HEIs
- The notion of customers and how this impacted on how students were perceived
- Strategy and the extent to which institutions had a clear strategic direction compared to the extent to which they 'played the game', not that these two positions are incompatible
- Partnerships and resources in that no higher education institution has gone bankrupt in the past twenty five years suggesting that they have managed their finances quite well, thank you.

- Processes, that is, whether higher education institutions understand clearly the processes in which they are engaged.

At the end of chapter six I concluded that the Model was applicable in that a self-assessment exercise using the Model criteria and approaches had been undertaken to some effect: a list of strengths, areas for improvement and action points had been created as a result, which demonstrated a holistic assessment of the organisation. I was able too to identify some of the facilitating factors which members of the Task Force say as helpful in thinking about the implementation of the Model. However, issues were also identified by the Task Force members who had gathered the data against the Model criteria that would get in the way of a successful use of the Model. So, the helpful and hindering factors were:

- Effective and committed leadership
- The Excellence Model was seen as a comprehensive and analytical tool enabling identification of quality improvements in a proactive way
- The way in which the use of the Model had facilitated a more joined-up perspective on the institution
- Resistance to change
- Resources
- Workloads and time pressures
- The perception of staff of yet another initiative
- Immediate priorities and the fact that the EFQM Excellence Model would not be seen as being able to help with these
- Motivations – that is, staff's own agendas
- Lack of functions working together
- Attitude towards quality, that is, whether there was culture of compliance or quality improvement

At the end of chapter seven I identified a number of themes that appeared common to HEIs from an analysis of their printed materials. These were:

- Innovation in teaching and learning
- Student support
- Teaching quality assessments,
- Research assessment results
- Employability
- Widening access

- Quality/excellence
- Reputation and status

In my conclusion to chapter seven I expressed the view that the issues listed above could have been externally derived and that some of them almost certainly had been from the way in which they were described. This conclusion suggests that there are themes that are common to HEIs indicating a possible cultural synthesis. However, the fact that most of these common issues were externally derived suggests too that HEIs are determined by what is required of them by external bodies and masters.

At the end of chapter eight I identified a number of themes that had emerged from my interviews with nine HEIs. These were:

- A devolved and fragmented structure
- The impact of academic autonomy/mindset
- How leadership was perceived
- How management was perceived
- Quality
- Change
- Students (how they are viewed)
- History, status and reputation

Through this process of using different research methods it was interesting to note the consistency (or lack of consistency) of factors as can be seen from Table 27:

	Leadership	Strategy	People (staff)	Partnerships and resources	Academic mindset/autonomy	Processes	Lack of time/resource	Resistance to change	Approaches to quality	Innovation in teaching and learning	How students are viewed	Research assessment	Employability	Widening access	History, reputation and status	Structure	Management
Ability to change the model through the use of data for innovation (Chapter 5)	X	X	X	X		X					X						
Ability to change the model through participant observation (Chapter 6)	X				X		X	X	X					X		X	
Ability to change the model through analysis of individual HEIs (Chapter 7)									X	X	X	X	X		X		
Ability to change the model through interviews with nine HEIs (Chapter 8)	X				X			X	X		X				X	X	X
Overall	3	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	3	1	3	1	1	1	2	2	1

**Table 27: Research methods and themes that have arisen from each Source: Research**

As can be seen from the above Table there were seven themes that occurred from 50% or more than 50% of the methods used. These were:

- Leadership
- Academic autonomy/mindset
- Resistance to change
- Quality
- How students are viewed

- History, reputation and status
- Structure

I will comment on each of these themes in section 9.2 of this chapter.

These data gathering research methods and the analysis therefrom have led me to the following two conclusions:

1. The Model can be used in higher education and to some benefit. The evidence sources for this conclusion in the course of this research are:

- the self-assessment process in 'Clock' College was achieved in that evidence was obtained against the criterion parts of the Model and an evaluation of the institution's strengths and areas for improvement identified;
- the self-assessment gathering process facilitated a working together by the members of the Task Force in 'Clock' College which arrangement was seen as beneficial by those involved. They highlighted the advantages in understanding other functional activity and how they worked which created more of a feeling of joined-up working;
- the members of the Task Force in 'Clock' College found the self-assessment exercise using the Model holistic in nature rather than focusing on the academic side of an institution's activities;
- from a theoretical point of view it is possible to take the criteria of the Model and apply them to a higher education context;
- Action planning to achieve improvement is a more comprehensive exercise if using the elements of the Model to undertake a self-assessment. This is evidenced from the comparisons undertaken in 'Clock' against other action plans which demonstrated a more organisationally comprehensive assessment.

These conclusions are also borne out by the HEFCE funded projects (Sheffield Hallam University, 2003 and Liverpool John Moores, 2003).

2. However, in the course of this research I identified cultural elements in higher education institutions both through an analysis of the printed materials as well as the interviews that

would both facilitate and get in the way of effective use of such a tool. To enable me to reach this conclusion I employed a tool used in chapter seven, that is, Lewin's Force Field Analysis by identifying driving and restraining factors to be taken into account when looking to implement any major change. In chapter two of this thesis I identified potential problems associated with the implementation of both total quality management principles and the application of the EFQM Excellence Model. These factors I have taken into account through my research methods and so the outcomes are included in this analysis.

## **9.2 Driving and restraining factors in the implementation of the Excellence Model to higher education**

From my research I consider the driving and restraining factors to be as follows:

### **9.2.1 Leadership**

Leadership was an issue that came up in the desk research, the participant observation and in a six of the interviews described in chapter eight.

The last ten years have seen massive change in the UK higher education sector imposed from the outside in. The main sources of these pressures on higher education establishments are students, other education establishments - both in UK and abroad in a competitive relationship, the government, the industry and business community and the local community. This sense of pressure is reflected in the printed materials where one can see evidence of external and governmental agenda. Many pressures from a variety of stakeholders have come to bear on higher education establishments. This has resulted in these establishments having to examine seriously the way they are governed. Previous models of governance based on the notion of collegiality do not sit comfortably with pressures from customers who expect a business-like response to dynamic situations. A more focussed organisational vision is needed that includes an outward-facing, customer-oriented element which is at conflict with the inward-looking culture that previously was prevalent in universities. (Davies, Hides and Casey, 2001). Of course, this statement raises the issue about who the customers of higher education are to which I will return later in this chapter in section 9.2.5. At the same time it is not clear that the required changes could not have been obtained by changes in collegiality and not its abolition. There does seem to have existed a dichotomy between the need for management to cope with the efficient and effective use of limited resources and the concept of collegiality.

However, imperfections of collegiality have also been identified (Hellawell and Hancock, 2001). These include the possibility of vocal and articulate individuals swaying the decision-making process to the point that collegial decisions can be driven by some of the staff who have their own 'agendas'. This was an issue which was apparent in both the participant observation and also in the interviews. Another 'imperfection' is that it can result in a slow and difficult process.

Leadership is *the* significant driving force in the use of the Model. The Model is based on the premise that customer results, people (employee) results and society results are achieved through leadership driving policy and strategy, people, resources and partnerships leading ultimately to excellence in key performance results. So, without effective leadership it is not going to work. In chapter eight I identified a stalemate position after Jarratt (CVCP, 1985) in that, although there was a general recognition that there was a need for change, many academics fought against it and, at the same time vice-chancellors perhaps attempted to impose change and thereby did not manage to persuade staff of the need for change. It would seem that to effect change now it would seem that both academic staff and academic leaders must realise that positive change can emerge from agreements between the two sides to cooperate. However, I cannot see what imperative there is for academic staff to make this change, other than through an evolutionary process. Whilst there is nothing wrong with such a process, it takes time. If one wishes to effect change quickly in response to external markets and increasing competitiveness, then there may not be that time.

If one looks at the sub-criterion parts of the Model criterion Leadership (appendix 02) one will see that the approach suggested by the Model is that leaders have responsibility to develop the mission, vision and values of the organisation but that, at the same time, there is a need for leaders to motivate, support and recognise the organisation's people. This means that there is no conflict between the approach suggested by the Model and that which might be appropriate and seen to work within the culture of the higher education sector and its focus on collegiality and consensual decision-making through committee. Of course, collegiality is much more than decision making through committees - it implies a very different form of distributed leadership. However, is it substantially different to what might be seen as effective leadership? (Handy 1993, Peters, 1989, Mullins, 1994).

However, a difficulty that leaders will experience in higher education is the notion of yet another management 'fad' (Birnbaum, 2001; Temple, 2005) and of managerialism (Trow, 1994), both of which will impede any change initiative and certainly that of the Excellence Model which is likely to be seen as having an application to the private sector and not to the public. This means that



these leaders need to be all the more effective as the change agents referred to above and to have the necessary skills to work their way through such an unresponsive environment. Schein (1992) says that the dynamic processes of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make one realize that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin. Boyett (1996) identifies a conscious decision to appoint a vice-chancellor with a new style, that what was needed was someone who would develop and drive the strategies which would successfully move the University of Nottingham into the 1990s and an era of major opportunities and change in higher education. She concluded from her research, speaking to senior staff at the University that the new vice-chancellor had changed the culture of the institution and that his impact had been significant. She concludes that in the new competitive market of higher education that a new visionary kind of leader is required. What is interesting about her research is that she feels that this is demonstrated by the example in her research. From my own research I would be less optimistic about the potential of vice-chancellors in my sample to make a difference, as by and large they were not perceived generally as particularly effective in their roles. However, there were also exceptions (HEIs C, D and H) where there were leaders who created a clear sense of direction and who had found ways of implementing same, overcoming any barriers that got in the way.

Leadership is important in order to facilitate change. Berg and Ostergren (1979) listed 'leadership' among their four decisive factors, although they did not define precisely what they meant by 'effective' leadership. However, Lindquist (1978), in his analysis, described the style of leadership that seems to be necessary:

"Leadership, however, was not the kind traditionally associated with a strong, authoritarian father figure. No leader succeeded in telling largely autonomous professionals how to educate; no leader succeeded in making directions stick if those professionals were not in agreement with the leader's instructions. Rather, the approach to leadership which made a difference was a combination of initiating change activities, structuring and guiding and pushing and supporting the planned change process".

Given the recent history of tension between management and academic leadership, a new model for leadership in tertiary education must embrace some fundamental principles to overcome the inherent dysfunctions this tension tends to generate. The most fundamental of these is an institutional requirement to clearly demonstrate that academic and managerial leadership are equally valued.

Mullins (1994) identified three main styles of leadership:

1. The authoritarian (or autocratic) style is where the focus of power is with the leader and all interactions within the group move towards the leader. The leader alone exercises decision-making and authority for determining policy, procedures for achieving goals, work tasks and relationships, control of rewards or punishments.
2. The democratic style is where the focus of power is more with the group as a whole and there is greater interaction within the group. The leadership functions are shared with members of the group and the leader is more part of a team. The group members have a greater say in decision making, determination of policy, implementation of systems and procedures.
3. A genuine laissez-faire style is where the leader observes that members of the group are working well on their own. The leader consciously makes a decision to pass the focus of power to members, allow them freedom of action and not to interfere; but is readily available if help is needed. There is often confusion over this style of leadership behaviour. The word 'genuine' is emphasised because this is to be contrasted with the leaders who could not care, who deliberately keep away from the trouble spots and do not want to get involved and just let the members of the group get on with the work in hand. This is more a non-style of leadership or it could perhaps be labelled as abdication.

Sir Michael Bichard, rector of the University of the Arts, London, writing in the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education's magazine, says that VCs take themselves far too seriously:

"Sure, everyone has to work hard but I think that some people don't understand the pressures that leaders in other sectors have to face where no time is your own, ever".  
(Bichard, 2004).

Sir Michael believes that the differences between leading a large HEI and leading any other large organisation are exaggerated:

"Higher education seems to me to be an introspective world, which persists in thinking it has characteristics, which are very different from elsewhere. I think, for instance, that the collegiality notion is exaggerated – people do expect some leadership. They don't really want endlessly to be debating 'where next'?". (Bichard, 2004).

The Leadership Foundation was launched in March 2004 to help the HE sector meet the future demands of global HE provision. It was awarded £10 million of funding from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for the first three years of operation. The Foundation describes itself as being more than a delivery organisation in that they have a catalyst role to stimulate new ideas and initiatives in leadership development, to provide reliable evidence of good practice and evaluation. I think it is fair to say that it is too early to evaluate fully the effectiveness of this development whilst at the same time recognising the possible usefulness of such a facility in raising awareness of the issues around leadership and in promoting effective leadership concepts and practices. I don't think there is any doubt that such a Leadership Foundation is needed. However, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Foundation is still to be made and there may be questions about whether the approach being currently adopted is what the sector needs.

It was also interesting to note the Times Higher Award 2005 for Employer of the Year went to Sheffield Hallam University for its leadership development programme. It is encouraging to see such a development. However, it is also interesting to note that Sheffield Hallam is one of the universities involved in the use of the EFQM Excellence Model through a HEFCE-funded project. This suggests that a particular kind of culture may exist there that will highlight the need for such work.

So, leadership is a significant factor in taking the Model forward. Given its manifestations in higher education this seems to be at odds with some, mainly the 'old' universities that adhere to a collegial philosophy and way of doing things, partly because no-one has attempted to adapt collegial leadership to changing conditions rather than to abolish it. However, I did see through the interviews a change in how leaders were being perceived within higher education. An example of this shift is the introduction of the Leadership Foundation to look specifically at the development of leaders for today and the future.

### **9.2.2 Academic autonomy/mindset**

HEIs appear to operate with one function or department being distinct from another. One gets the impression of little joined-up functioning with each area doing its own thing. Equally, academic departments are self-contained units with little reference to either the institution or to any other department, academic or administrative:

"I think there is a divide because of the academic staff. Traditionally, academic staff had more holidays and were paid more – their time was their own within the

institution; they were their own boss; they entered the classroom and closed the door and they were their own boss. When I first started here in my late 20's when I went into the classroom I did what I wanted to do. It was my job plan and I was trusted to get on with the job. Now, I don't think that happens. I think there is always this conflict or tension between academic and support staff. That doesn't mean to say that they don't get on well but I think there are people on the support staff who see academic staff as having better pay and conditions than the support staff. Okay, the conditions are changing and the holidays are still coming down and I think that the academic staff see the stock of the support staff rising – why do we need more support staff? This institution is about teaching students; I don't think it's a serious tension but it does exist. I don't think it manifests itself in anything unhealthy particularly but I think that tension does exist". (Transcript E, lines 174-187)

As well as support and academic functions not finding ways of working together one of the dominant issues and themes arising from this research and its impact on organisational functioning is the concept of academic autonomy. This was a common theme coming from eight of the HEIs visited with most of them seeing it both as a given and as an inhibiting and restrictive aspect within HEIs. I think it's less the concept and more the outworking of it that's seen as a problem. Elton (2006) identifies a contributory factor here that academics tend to see the rights but not the responsibilities associated with such autonomy. It did seem to me that the academic colleagues with whom I met were more likely to defend the concept and its practice if not the extreme manifestations thereof. The degree of structural and disciplinary devolution which was common across the HEIs visited was sometimes seen as having a negative impact and sometimes a positive one:

"Our ex Director of Finance described it not as an institution but like trying to manage 300 corner shops – they've all got their own way of doing things, they won't stick to corporate procedures, they won't respond in a timely way and it's almost as if they aren't employees. Substantial amounts of money arrive in their bank accounts at the end of every month by some mystical way that has nothing to do with their teaching or their research". (Transcript B, lines 535-541);

and

"I would say that it's a university that has a very strong departmental ethos. By that, I mean that the primary unit, as in many universities, is the department. But, the strong links – the sense of identity that most people working in a university have, will be with their department not with a Faculty, or a School or anything above that". (Transcript H, lines 1-5).

So, academic autonomy is seen as a key professional right and responsibility but is not one that seems to be applied to other professional groups within higher education – just academics. This kind of dichotomy had led to a separation of functions if not academic units to a point where staff relate more to the unit or department which they are a part of rather than the institution by which they are employed.

Also, the fact that academic staff are attempting to fulfil the roles and functions of two professions in research and teaching has an impact too on the way in which they perceive themselves and perhaps more importantly students. This is an issue to which I will return later in this chapter in section 9.2.5.

Academic autonomy and the way in which that translates itself in HEIs was a significant component that featured in the interviews that took place and as such must have a part to play in the culture of higher education. Additionally, it was a significant factor in 'Clock' in terms of being seen as a potential inhibiting factor to the use of the Model. In terms of applicability of the Model academic autonomy is going to function as a restraining factor as it seems to manifest itself negatively in relation to a commitment to the institution.

### **9.2.3 Change**

Response to change too is an element of higher education culture that needs mentioning here as an restraining factor. My research suggests that there is a lack of a culture of change in the HE sector. This was in evidence in both the participant observation and five of the nine interviews. At times, through the interviews I was left with the impression that nothing ever changed. This cannot be the case, of course but staff did, at times, feel this to be the case. At the same time, whilst it is certainly true that academics tend to be very traditional, even in research, to force them to change is probably the very worst way to achieve change.

My conclusions reached on the analysis of the printed materials demonstrates the extent to which HEIs mention the same themes which have largely been derived from external initiatives. In making this observation I have in mind things like teaching quality assessment, the research assessment exercise and the government initiatives on widening access and participation. So, there is the appearance of change but when I look at the interview outcomes I can see that little internal change takes place. In fact, there seems to be a real aversion to change which I think, at least to some extent, is borne out by the fact that a number of these

institutions have been around for some time and they question the need to change. So, whilst these externally imposed changes have had an impact, they are often more bureaucratic than real and appear to have reduced the likelihood of meaningful and lasting change.

With respect to the EFQM Excellence Model continuous learning, innovation and improvement are integral and core to the Model. It is clear that a culture of quality improvement does not exist in HEIs and so it is difficult to see how this aspect of higher education culture could be compatible with such a key element and underpinning thinking behind the Model. In fact, there was evidence from my research to suggest that such a culture is discouraged by external quality assessment, which removes internal responsibility.

#### **9.2.4 Quality**

As an issue quality arose in the participant observation, the analysis of printed materials and in six of the interviews as a significant factor.

In chapter six I discuss the process and benefits of a self-assessment process. Such an approach has its roots in the Enlightenment idea that we can make rational decisions in our own best interests and that we can come to a clearer understanding of what we do and who we are by freeing ourselves of distorted ways of reasoning and acting. However, the language of self-assessment has been taken over by QAA processes and as such would act as a strong deterrent to the implementation of the Model.

Barnett (2000) identifies a self-critical community as a condition for realizing the 'university'. This is an integral part of the Model and one which could be assisted by self-assessment processes in higher education as both internal and external reviews take place which require those writing to be reflective about their provision and their approaches to it. This kind of self-critical mindset approach would be helpful in looking at the possible implementation of the Model. The Dutch model which does not externally assess but ensures that internal self-assessment has taken place, is more in keeping with the thinking underpinning the Model. There is a 'however' here too in that, from my research, I observe academic staff seeing this reflective process as imposed rather than having value in itself and so the terminology itself would act as a deterrent as it would be associated with an external quality system. At the same time my research suggests that there are staff who do see benefits in thinking about how the quality of provision and courses on offer could be improved and so it might be possible to identify and 'use' these people as champions of such a process.

Both through the participant observation and through the interviews I identified a culture of quality compliance rather than one of quality improvement. Stephenson (2004) says that quality assurance systems tend to begin with the best of intentions but often end up spawning a 'tick box' mentality, alienating the academic community and damaging the public reputations of higher education. These outcomes were in evidence from my research. This is not to say that quality improvement did not exist but to assert that the quality assurance often got in the way of the latter with some of my interviewees expressing this view explicitly.

So, it would seem that so much effort has gone into the satisfying of external bodies in the assurance of quality that there has been little time left for the development of quality improvement. Additionally, there is the question of whether such a culture exists, that is, is there a mindset in higher education which reflects on what is being done in a non-defensive way and identifies ways of making things better or doing better things. The experience of 'Clock' is that this was not the case. When a list of strengths and areas for improvement was presented to senior management there was such resistance to the idea of improvement, that the development went no further.

#### **9.2.5 Students**

The issue of how students are perceived arose in all the methods with the exception of the participant observation. This may be because 'Clock' as a relatively new HEI has a focus on student rather than research and so the question of whether students are customers or not would not arise.

The view of students is an important and significant issue within HEIs per se but the concept of a customer, whoever that might be, is also a barrier to the use of the Model in higher education in that very little consideration is given to the concept at all. My research suggests that there is more of an increasing recognition of students as customers than I might have expected. This was clear in two of the institutions visited which were also 'old' and research-led universities. The fact too that one HEI describes itself as being student-centred was also indicative of this phenomenon. However, there was also the more traditional view to be found mainly in the 'old' universities where students were seen as a bit of a nuisance and getting in the way of the 'real' work of the university – research. When the concept of customers came up in the course of my interviews students were identified as those customers. No one else. However, the concept itself is a bit alien as universities have traditionally not thought in that kind of way.

The issue of student support/views of students is an interesting one in that the picture presented through the printed materials and through the interviews was quite different with the latter suggesting that students could be seen as a secondary priority and getting in the way of academic staff's research activity (although this was not exclusively the case) and the former which were largely directed at students in the form of university guides, their websites and prospectuses which inevitably wished to convey a positive image to prospective students in terms of what the university has to offer them in way of an educational experience and support. The printed materials did provide a particularly positive picture of what students could expect from academic support through to high prospects and support towards ensuring their employability which is a bit at variance with what appears to be the reality on the ground.

With respect to the EFQM Excellence Model customers are the recipients or beneficiaries of the activities, products or services of the educational establishment. 'Service' is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "the action or process of serving" or "an act of assistance". Often in higher education the use of the word 'service' is seen as synonymous with functions like restaurants or hairdressers. However, seen in the context of this definition I think there are few academic staff who would argue with the notion of assisting students through their educative process. Stephenson (2004) argues that a university is providing a service rather than manufacturing a product and furthermore, the 'customer' or recipient of the service – the student – is an active participant in the process.

It is open to question who higher education's customers are, both from a conceptual and practical point of view. However, whoever they are, in terms of the principles of the Model there is a need to 'measure' how those customers view the service or the 'product' they receive. To me, that makes sense in any service driven activity. If one does not receive feedback on how well one is doing, then how does one know how well one is doing? This is not to deny, of course, the need to still engage in a process of self reflection. ("This above all, to Thy own self be true". (Polonius in Hamlet). However, in the context of higher education there is a need for a debate to take place about who the customers are, clarity around the rationale for definitions of customers and differences of emphasis or conflicts of interest recognised and their resolution discussed. Failure to do so will result in a vacuous environment where no one is clear about who has what role. As indicated in chapter two on the EFQM Excellence Model possible candidates for the title of customer of HE's services are:

- students
- HEFCE



- government
- society at large

The Model is not prescriptive in saying who HE's customers are, just that they must have them given the fact that they are providing a service.

So important is this factor in the Model that without an identification of customers it would not seem possible to take the application of the Model any further forward. It is not just the question of whether students are customers that is at issue here but whether HEIs see themselves as having any kind of customer. It does also need to be acknowledged that some of higher education's activities relate to a search for knowledge for its own and society's sake. It is interesting that the German constitution recognises this fact and expects both universities and government to recognise this difference between service activities and 'cultural' activities. In the course of the interviews students were increasingly being seen in the role of customer. However, until some debate about who the customers might be take place the Model is not going to be effective.

### **9.2.6 History, reputation and status**

This aspect of higher education arose in both the printed materials and the interviews. In fact, in the printed materials I found evidence of all HEIs being concerned about their reputation and status:

"XXXX's 2001 RAE assessment was particularly welcome, reflecting as it does the excellence and relevance of our research portfolio. The world-class status of our Communications, Media and Cultural Studies area was confirmed by the award of a 5 rating for the second consecutive assessment, while Sociology, Art & Design, Law, Psychology, Social Work and Health Sciences all increased their ratings. XXXX was also rated in the top ten of post-1992 universities for research by the Guardian newspaper. This confirms the key role we are playing both in highlighting the importance of research as an indispensable and integral function of modern universities, and in making a vital contribution to local and regional regeneration through collaborations and partnerships". (HEI R, Website, 5 March 2005);

and

"The XXXX has been scoring consistently high marks on quality assessments with the highest possible marks for many subjects in the last 5 years. A pattern of

excellence has emerged over the course of these quality checks which shows the university's strengths to be first what you care about most: employability, quality of teaching, links with industry, modern and up-to-date faculties, flexibility and dedication to widening participation". (HEI L, Prospectus, page 3).

History too was often seen as a proxy for quality, that is, 'we've been around for some time and so we must be doing something right'. This was true even for the new HEIs who often mentioned their antecedents in an attempt to convey this message of longevity:

"University title was granted to us by the Privy Council in XXXX following a rigorous scrutiny by the Quality Assurance Agency, but our distinctive character has been shaped through a merger of many colleges. Our religious foundation which dates back to XXXX (19<sup>th</sup> century) is also reflected today in our mission statement". (HEI D, Prospectus, Principal introduction, page 2).

However, the 'inside' information from my interviewees told a different story on occasions:

"There's still a slight feeling of the glories of the 60's and 70's and then actually our campus began to get really run down". (Transcript A, lines 275-276);

and

"It is a strong research university but it's maybe not as strong as it sometimes thinks it is. It needs to maintain and build the reputation so it has to project that to the outside world. And then work hard inside to make sure the reality is close to what is put forward, because at the moment we're struggling a bit but that will change over the next few years". (Transcript G, lines 3-8).

Interestingly, HEIs A and G are both 'old' universities and so this is an area where it has been useful to compare what is said through the printed materials with the perception on the ground.

This aspect of HEIs is not particularly significant when it comes to the applicability of the Model because the use of the Model is an exercise in self-assessment rather than an assessment of its reputation. That is, the process is meant to inform the organisation in its quality improvement strategies. A question, however, given this perspective within HEIs of the importance of longevity is the extent to which they would be able to engage in such an

open and honest assessment. This was borne out in 'Clock' when the members of the senior management team were unhappy or unwilling to embrace the areas for improvement that had been identified.

### **9.2.7 Structure**

Aspects of structure which came through both the participant observation and interview research methods was that of fragmentation which consisted of two components: firstly, the way in which academic staff see themselves as comparatively independent of the institution, and secondly, the way in which there is little joined-up functioning within HEIs. The puzzle how these chaotic institutions can continue to exist (and even flourish) has been to some extent explained by chaos theory, previously characterised as 'organised anarchy'. (Cohen and March, 1986).

In the course of a private conversation with a Dean of a Faculty at a specialist higher education College he recounted a conversation that he had with a member of staff whose work and timekeeping was giving some cause for concern. The member of staff's riposte was 'but you're treating me like an employee'. This kind of attitude will not augur well for the use of the Model in higher education, as it is indicative of little commitment to the institution as a whole, rather more of a commitment to the discipline unit with which the academic member of staff is involved. Alongside this issue is that of the gap between those involved in teaching and those in research in terms of how they might perceive their role within higher education. This in itself creates a feeling of fragmentation with a lack of clarity for staff about the role that they have within a higher education institution and the expectations that go along with that.

Additionally, there was in evidence both through the participant observation and the interviews a lack of joined-up functioning. It was interesting to note that one of the positive aspects identified by the members of the Task Force for being involved in the self-assessment exercise was the way in which that had allowed them to gain a better understanding of other functions and departments within the College. This aspect of higher education culture was also in evidence in a number of the interviews and was particularly noticeable in HEI F where some attempt had been made to develop processes but not only had these been done separately within functions but also they had not completed the institution-wide exercise. Of course, these points could equally argue for an adaptation of the model to the reality of the situation at least as strongly as the opposite.

Through both the participant observation and the interviews I identified people working in small groups or units, largely functional. In terms of the Excellence Model this could be helpful where there is a belief in the need to empower people, to facilitate working together in teams and encouraging improvement activities, all of which are best achieved through smaller teams of people both functional and cross-functional. So, there is an opportunity through this aspect of what I have identified as a feature of HEI culture to develop such a way of doing things. However, for this to succeed a facilitating framework needs to be in place whereby staff would see the benefits from such an approach, be supported and be clear about what is expected of them. Where I think this potential driving factor turns into a restraining one is when the concepts of collegiality and academic autonomy refer only to the academic functions and not to others and where such approaches to working are taken rather than set within a wider organisational framework.

So, structure could act as both a driving and restraining factor in that a devolved structure at departmental or unit level could provide a focus for the application of the Model. However, there would be a limit to the extent to which that was effective unless it was a self-contained structure; otherwise, the fragmented nature of higher education would get in the way of the application of such an institution-wide initiative.

### **9.3 Relationship between the ‘fundamental concepts of excellence’ and higher education**

To consider the applicability of the Model another way, I took the fundamental concepts of excellence that underpin the Model (described in chapter 2) and related them to the culture of higher educational institution.

As described in chapter four, section 4.9.1.2 on research methodology I had made the decision not to use the underpinning principles of the Model to see if these existed in higher education institutions as I felt that I wanted rather the culture of HEIs (if such a thing existed) to come through the process of discussion with those in HEIs whom I interviewed. However, at this stage in this thesis I think it would be of use and interest to consider the applicability of the Model in this way. I took therefore the fundamental concepts of excellence that underpin the Model (described in chapter two, section 2.3) and related them to the culture of higher educational institutions:

### 9.3.1 Results orientation

This concept is described as:

“Excellence is achieving results that delight the organisation’s stakeholders”. (EFQM, 2003)

In 'Clock' College this was the one area, that is, the results criteria of the Model, where the Task Force could find little evidence. Whilst this might have been partly to do with the process of preparation (see chapter six, section 6.3) there was also no doubt in the minds of the members of the task Force that there was a limited result focus in 'Clock'. These are results around people (employees), customers, society and key performance. Appendix 02 provides a more in-depth description of these criteria. Additionally, the assessment criteria for the results criteria of the Model are:

- that trend data can be identified preferably over the last five years
- that targets are appropriate, set and achieved
- that there are comparisons with external organisations
- that it can be demonstrated that the results are caused by the approach
- that the results address relevant areas.

Results in 'Clock' College were just not collected nor addressed in any deliberate or comprehensive way. Also, the issue of such management information and performance data did not appear as a strong cultural element through either the printed materials nor the interviews. There were only two interviews, that of HEI D and HEI F where reference was made to the use and usefulness of management information:

“One of the things that we’re really concerned with is, like most post 1992 universities, retention and progression and so I’ve been helping to develop - well, we refer to it as a database but it is more than that – it’s really a series of tools so that management which, in this case, is Heads of School and a few chairs can use to give them better information about what’s driving their retention issues, so that they can focus in and look at particular groups of students, trace them through and see where the attrition is happening. Obviously, with a view to taking some kind of action as a result. But until you’ve got that kind of information available, I think initiatives tend to be a bit ‘bitty’”. (HEI D, transcript, lines 64-72);

and

“I do believe that we should be continuously improving but we don’t record and we don’t track enough and we don’t say ‘well, what was the output before and what was it afterwards and have we got proof’. Partly because the area that I’m involved in, it’s actually quite difficult. It’s quite difficult to identify a proper performance indicator. Some areas are relatively easy where you can measure the process; how many staff turnaround; how many staff do it but it isn’t as simple as that because you need to unpick what does the service involve”. (Transcript F, lines 220-227).

However, even these interviewees accepted that their approach to measurement was ‘patchy’. This does indicate how difficult it may be to introduce the Model, not because it may be inappropriate, but because the institutions quite generally lack in good practice. For example, institutional research, that is, management information and performance data, is needed, whatever model of quality is used.

Certainly, there are the published league tables but these are produced external to the HEIs. At no time did I get a strong sense of a results orientation as an integral part of the HE culture, never mind meeting the assessment criteria listed above.

### **9.3.2 Customer focus**

The description of this concept is:

“Excellence is creating sustainable customer value”. (EFQM, 2003)

I have already described earlier in this chapter and in chapter eight the lack of a customer orientation in higher education institutions. There is also the issue of how students are perceived but, notwithstanding a lack of agreement on this issue, there also does not seem to be any discussion about who the customers are of HEIs. At the same time, however, it was apparent through my research that there was an increasing view of students as customers as demonstrated by the following quote:

“The fact that students are paying now, or more particularly their parents are paying and the emphasis on students rights and entitlements has definitely changed things. It is definitely more consumer oriented than it used to be. I don’t want to suggest that staff were patronising of students in the past or unconcerned about students. I don’t

think that was the case at all but students themselves were not likely to be quite as explicitly demanding as they might be now". (HEI C, transcript, lines 188-194).

However, it does not to be acknowledged that there are plenty of people in academia who consider the whole concept of 'customer' inappropriate.

HEI C, which would be perceived as a prestigious traditional university, can see a shift in thinking about students as a result of a number of external factors. This position was reflected in other HEIs visited (HEIs D and F). However, an alternative view of students was also in evidence in the course of this research and that was that they got in the way of research (HEIs B and H) or that they were a bit of a nuisance (HEIs A, B and G) or that students were to blame for poor performance (HEI E).

So, my impression is that the concept of student as customers is undergoing some re-thinking largely as a result of the shift in student funding for their education.

### **9.3.3 Leadership and constancy of purpose**

This concept is described as:

"Excellence is visionary and inspirational leadership, coupled with constancy of purpose". (EFQM, 2003).

Again, I have referred to this issue both in this chapter and in chapter eight. Traditionally, the 'old' universities have viewed themselves as 'communities of scholars' which has created a perspective on leadership as a 'primus intra pares' so that any overt form of leadership was seen as a top-down phenomenon. However, the Model criteria make it clear that leadership is about clarity of purpose, empowerment of staff, motivation and support for staff, a far cry from the notion of a top-down approach to leadership. However, there is resistance in HEIs to leadership as a notion in the context of academic autonomy and freedom which can be exemplified by a number of change initiatives being seen as management 'fads'. Whilst I am not saying that such initiatives were not management 'fads' in the ill thought out ways in which they were implemented, I am saying that because of how leaders are viewed within HEIs that any such change would be difficult to implement.

**9.3.4 Management by processes and facts**

This fundamental concept is described as:

“Excellence is managing the organisation through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems, processes and facts”. (EFQM, 2003)

As described in this chapter and in chapter eight HEIs would appear to have a fragmented structure with a distinct divide between academia and the ‘administration’. Also, there is a divide with each of these functions resulting in little joined-up thinking or acting. Such fragmentation is then going to work against the principle of interrelated activities. Equally, as I said earlier in this section, there is little evidence of management information being used in a consistent and dedicated way and so this principle is unlikely to be met. The following is an example of the kind of attitude that prevails:

“I do believe that we should be continuously improving but we don’t record and we don’t track enough and we don’t say ‘well, what was the output before and what was it afterwards and have we got proof’. Partly because the area that I’m involved in, it’s actually quite difficult. It’s quite difficult to identify a proper performance indicator. Some areas are relatively easy where you can measure the process; how many staff turnaround; how many staff do it but it isn’t as simple as that because you need to unpick what does the service involves. So, it’s not easy and I have struggled with it. I have tried over the last three or four years to actually try and put something together but we haven’t got anything that’s really satisfactory yet”. (HEI F, transcript, lines 221-230).

**9.3.4 People development and involvement**

This fundamental concept is described as:

“Excellence is maximising the contribution of employees through their development and involvement”. (EFQM, 2003).

Two institutions in my sample made mention of bullying tactics and approaches in their institution whereby staff were expected to work long hours for little reward:



“A general culture is, I have to say or at least it can be perceived as, rather bullying. Excessively long working hours, driven by a fear of failure and lack of recognition, worried about funding.....” (HEI B, transcript, lines 151-153);

and

“The difficulty is that we have too many people here who work too hard for no extra recognition and how you actually break that over and above what’s expected is very difficult because no matter how many times you say you shouldn’t be working more than X hours a week, they still do. And if you say, well, I’m going to prioritise which we all often do, it always goes out the window, something else comes along”. (HEI F, transcript, lines 417-423).

A core value of all of the institutions visited was that of academic autonomy, that is, the professional autonomy afforded to academic staff. Another common value was the significance of research. This was a value largely in the ‘old’ universities. Another feature that was common to all the HEIs visited was that of their status and reputation. Each was keen to identify its credentials whether that was longevity (HEIs A and C), size (either big or small (HEIs A,B,C,D,G and H) or student support (HEIs A,B,C,D,E,F,G and H) although it must be recognised that this value appeared in prospectuses and so might reflect what the HEIs thought prospective students wanted to hear. However, the point is that a core value seemed to be a recognition of the need for each HEI to promote itself appropriately.

However, with each HEI common values outside of the above were not much in evidence. There were four HEIs that had attempted to make explicit their values:

“They are in the corporate plan but I attend management team meetings and there have been some interesting debates at management meetings about values and whether we should have them and how we should go about drafting them etc., and we have a relatively new Staff Development Officer and she has been very tenacious in trying to actually get this agenda pushed forward and she has succeeded. We have got some values now but in terms of getting those values agreed, the original proposal for a whole day management event, got watered down to a half day at the most and then it was a 2 hour session with the management team. I think it ended up with ¾ hour and I think that one of the ProVC’s went away and drafted something. So, it’s been a very top-down approach!” (HEI F, transcript, lines 106-116);

and

“This is what we say our values are:

- **Critical independence and academic freedom:** the University encourages objective, analytical and disinterested critical study and seeks, for example, to provide an environment in which its members can test and question received wisdom and put forward new and potentially controversial ideas. I am sure that's true. It's an academic institution carrying out research.
- **Lifelong learning:** valuing learning for its own sake as well as for the social and individual benefits it can bring, the University seeks to provide opportunities for higher and continuing education at all stages of adult life. No problem.
- **Inclusion:** the University is proud to be a multi-cultural and diverse community, and is determined to ensure that it treats all individuals fairly, with dignity and respect; that the opportunities it provides are open to all; and that it provides a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for staff, students and visitors. I think we've got a long way to go on that one. Like all big organisations inclusion doesn't quite happen in the way it's stated. Just for example, some areas might regard international students as a pain in the neck not because they're racist but because they are hard work.
- **Responsiveness:** the University is committed to being responsive to the needs of the communities which it serves. That's a dodgy one. That to me reads like a fob to the local community. We're not terribly responsive to our local community – we're a big international university and we tend to look beyond the city rather than in the city.
- **Openness, honesty and transparency:** the University is committed to the highest standards of corporate governance (as exemplified in its Code of Practice on Corporate Governance) and in particular to conducting its affairs with integrity, honesty and transparency. Absolutely right at the highest levels but when it comes down to day to day running that's a lot of rubbish. (HEI G, transcript, lines 91-120);

and

“The University's mission is to provide for our stakeholders accessible high quality learning environments that are innovative, challenging and enterprising. This is achieved by working in partnership with individuals, organisations and communities to develop their full potential within a culture which is:

- Excellent but not inaccessible
- Christian but not exclusive
- Supportive but not constraining
- Proactive locally but not parochial” (HEI D, website);

and

“To support the vision the university will uncompromisingly promote the following value set in a ‘can do – no blame’ culture:

- Become student-centred in all activities
- Encourage innovation
- Develop confidence
- Develop transparency and high standards of integrity
- Ensure equality of opportunity
- Help staff to be engaged and committed
- Ensure talent, success and quality are rewarded
- Create a partnership ethos” (HEI K, Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005).

Of course, there is the need to live values and not just state what they are. In fact my interviewee in HEI G made it clear that some of their espoused values did not work out in practice. (See HEI G transcript.).

There was little evidence of a culture of trust and empowerment through my research. In fact there was some evidence of a lack of trust and empowerment:

“I have to say that I’m not sure that management now within the staff, that comes with low morale, that management are particularly regarded as heroes. I’m not sure that across the institution and I don’t think it’s about popularity, I think it’s about respect”. I mean, there are people who are respected but at a general level, I’m not sure that the level of respect, confidence and maybe not so much trust but certainly confidence and respect for senior management are as high as maybe they should be. (HEI E, transcript, lines 149-155);

and

“The difficulty is that we have too many people here who work too hard for no extra recognition and how you actually break that over and above what’s expected is very difficult because no matter how many times you say you shouldn’t be working more than X hours a week, they still do. And if you say, well, I’m going to prioritise which we all often do, it always goes out the window, something else comes along”. (HEI F, transcript, lines 417-423);

and

“It’s quite, and this ties in with the bigness, but it can be quite an anonymous place. You know, it’s quite easy to hide yourself in such a big institution and can, therefore, be not very personal”. (HEI G, transcript, lines 8-10).

### **9.3.6 Continuous learning, innovation and improvement**

This fundamental concept is described as:

“Excellence is challenging the status quo and effecting change by using learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities”. (EFQM, 2003).

As described earlier in this chapter the culture of HEIs in my sample was generally risk-averse. At the same time the quality agenda seemed to be managed from the outside in with institutions feeling the weight of quality assessment and audit to the point that it seemed to prevent them from considering quality enhancement.

However, a higher education institution is about knowledge and much sharing of knowledge does go on, in particular from academics to students. However, because of the fragmented nature of HEI culture, there seems to be little sharing of knowledge internally and between functions.

### **9.3.7 Partnership development**

This fundamental concept is described as:

“Excellence is developing and maintaining value-adding partnerships”. (EFQM, 2003)

There was some evidence through the printed materials with two of the twenty mentioning partnership arrangements of some kind:

“A strengthening of the economic, environmental and cultural life of the region through opportunities in higher education, creating partnerships, integrating with communities and generating and disseminating valuable knowledge”. (HEI F, University Mission Statement);

and

“The University will contribute actively to the economic strength of the region by supporting the growth and success of businesses, particularly small and medium-sized businesses”. (HEI T, website, extract from University Strategy)

However, this aspect of working did not feature strongly in the printed materials as can be seen from only two references out of twenty institutions and was not an aspect of the interviews.

### **9.3.8 Public responsibility**

This fundamental concept is described as:

“Excellence is exceeding the minimum regulatory framework in which the organisation operates and to strive”. (EFQM, 2003)

There are many in HEIs who would argue that the key responsibility of higher education staff is to society, which in turn entitles them to the trust, freedom and funding they receive. (Harris, 2005). Public responsibility is seen therefore as a cornerstone of the role and function of higher education.

As I have described in chapter two, section 2.8 regulatory frameworks have been put in place by the Funding Councils, through the Quality Assurance Agency, to ensure that institutions are running their affairs in such a way as to command public confidence. This is the most recent development in this area of quality assurance and follows on from a more interventionist approach, which left academic staff felling the burden of the associated bureaucratic processes.

However, there is evidence from my interviews that institutions played the quality assurance game and did not necessarily move beyond the regulatory framework which was put in place by external bodies like the QAA and so there were issues about the extent to which institutions adopted a quality improvement culture for themselves to build on what they were doing and to make enhancements.

## **9.4 Conclusions**

So, I argue that the Model could be applied to higher education. However, I would add too that there are cultural elements in higher education which inhibit this applicability:

- Structural fragmentation
- Risk-aversion
- Weight of external quality assessments
- Reliance on external quality assessments
- Lack of effective leadership
- Lack of clarity about the customers of higher education
- Heavy external control in the name of accountability

This is not to suggest that there are not sub-cultures nor that each higher education institution has its own way of doing things but to say that these themes do appear to be applicable to most of the HEIs in my sample.

I argue too that the fundamental principles which underpin the Excellence Model are not much in evidence in higher education institutions - there seems to be little synergy between the two. I think the thing that depresses me most about my research was that HEIs are so dictated to by outside bodies which fund and determine quality to the point that they seem unable to develop an internal quality culture. If they could move to that position, then I believe that the Excellence Model could provide them with a framework within which to develop such a culture.

The above driving and restraining factors come from an analysis of all the research methods. Such a convergence suggests that the restraining factors listed are reliable in terms of the sector as a whole and so would need to be brought into a balance with corresponding 'driving' ones. From my research I cannot see enough 'driving' factors to persuade HEIs to adopt the Model.

I concluded too in section 9.1 that the EFQM Excellence Model would not be easily applied to higher education given the cultural elements identified. Additionally, the number of driving and restraining factors identified suggest that either the Model is not going to work within the culture of higher education, even though I and others (Liverpool John Moores, 2003; Sheffield Hallam University, 2003) have seen the benefits through use of the Model, or that a culture change needs to take place. In chapter three on culture I expressed the view that culture in terms of my approach to this research was something that an organisation *is*, that is, an essential element of its being. This was, I felt, an appropriate position to take in relation to my research as, at that point in time I did not want to change culture but to identify it and what that might look like in higher education. However, if one wishes to change culture, then one needs to see it as something an institution *has*, that is a variable like other aspects of an organisation. Such a shift also requires facilitation and a positive attitude and response to change. As I have indicated in the course of this thesis, change is not an aspect of higher education culture that comes easily and so culture change as an initiative is unlikely to be taken or managed easily. Johnson and Scholes (2002) say that the most powerful symbol of all in relation to change is the behaviour of the change agents themselves. This is demonstrated by HEI H where my interviewee identified the reason for the shift in thinking about research activity in the institution as coming from the vice-chancellor. Kotter and Heskett (1992) identify a number of factors that get in the way of effective culture change:

- That people stick to the old ways of doing things even though they may inhibit the organisation from adapting to a changing environment;
- That senior managers may lose touch with the needs of their organization and may fail to support the change efforts;
- That leaders who sponsor change efforts may fail to develop and communicate a compelling need for the change;
- That leadership may lose confidence early in the change process when results are disappointing;
- That the length of time it takes to accomplish culture change can be discouraging;
- That the strategy may not be successfully passed on to new managers

However, depressingly, in the course of this research there were not many examples of effective leadership.

Middlehurst (1995) says that the link between leadership and change is close; change creates the need for leadership and leaders are, or are perceived to be, initiators and drivers of change. As decision-making contexts grow more obscure and resources become more difficult to allocate, leaders in higher education can benefit from understanding their institutions as cultural entities. To effect a culture change there is the need for leaders in HEIs to take account of the cultures within. This requires them to make an assessment of the current culture. Next, there is the need to make a judgment about what values and beliefs need to replace the current ones and to then make decisions about how to take this forward. No one would suggest that this is an easy process but failure to do so will leave the HEIs at the mercy of external scrutiny which is less than helpful and effective. Adoption of such an approach would enable HEIs to regain responsibility for the quality of their provision and services.

If someone had asked me at the outset of this research if I thought the EFQM Excellence Model was going to be applicable to higher education I probably would have said yes based on my knowledge of the Model and a limited experience of higher education. However, having undertaken this research my response now would be in the negative. At least, I would say that it is not applicable until some strong champions and leaders are found who can change the mindset and culture that exists in the higher education sector, not just to implement the Model but also to effect change, to make HEIs more effective, to encourage a culture of improvement in the interests of both staff and the people they serve.

## **9.5 My journey**

This chapter would not, however, be complete without some reflection on the journey that I have taken in the course of this ethnographic research.

Coming to the end of this PhD research there are inevitably some things that I would do differently and some things which I would do either in the same way or similarly. The things falling into the latter camp include working with my supervisor whose input and perspectives have been invaluable and whose support for and his confidence in me have provided me with the motivation to keep going. Undertaking PhD research on a part-time basis is a very solitary activity and it helps beyond measure to have someone interested in what you are doing.



Of the research methods adopted, I would use three of them again; the theoretical application of the Excellence Model to higher education, the participant observation and the interviews, all of which I enjoyed enormously with the two latter ones reflecting my predisposition towards learning from watching and talking to others. I would have liked to have conducted more interviews, not because I think the outcomes would have been different, but because I enjoyed those confidential, inside perspectives.

The printed materials method was one suggested to me and I am not sure that I would adopt such an approach again. It was interesting to see the public face of HEIs and to see the extent to which they conformed to external expectations in what they portrayed about themselves, but I never felt that I got their essence. In the end I had to admit that evidence which is so clearly tainted by self-interest can never be reliable in itself and so it was only useful as a research method. If I were to undertake this research again I would take the printed materials and the interviews one after the other to test out some of the statements from the printed materials. As it was, I was only able to do so in a limited way.

On the down side I think it took me a little while to understand what I was attempting, particularly in terms of process. I had no theoretical input strategies and methodology other than what I gleaned from reading and discussions with my sister who was completing an Ed.D. If I were to start again, I would ensure that I had an thorough understanding of these matters to ensure an early appropriate choice of research approach.

At the same time, I spent a long time on a literature review, looking at others' work. It took me some time to realise that it was also my work that mattered. This was facilitated by my supervisor's ongoing interest in my thoughts and ideas and his respect for them. In this way I came to realise that I was at least equal to some of the people whose work and names I held in high esteem.

I tended to undertake the analysis of the printed materials at the same time as undertaking the interviews. Whilst I always had the printed materials analysis in advance for each of the HEIs visited, it did mean that if anything particularly interesting came up through that analysis, I was not in a position to then visit that particular HEI. Perhaps, I could have done but by that time I was into interview transcription which felt like it took forever! I was pleased that I did the transcribing myself as I feel it provided me with an initial insight into the issues for each particular HEI. It was at times laborious but well worth the effort.

It was suggested to me that I could have focussed on a smaller number of HEIs and interviewed a greater number in each to achieve two or three different perspectives on the same HEI. However, I don't regret my approach in this regard and feel that with the range of people I interviewed, I obtained an insight into some common themes that, I believe, make HE what it is.

I have been on an amazing journey and have learned a lot about higher education and myself. I have learned that I am conscientious and persistent, analytical yet incisive and most of all, that I am able to achieve that which I set my mind to.

## **9.6 Recommendations and further work**

### **9.6.1 Leadership**

Throughout my conclusions I have argued for more effective leadership in higher education institutions. What might this consist of? In chapter eight I identified the forms of leadership mentioned in the course of my interviews and so how those staff viewed effective leadership. From that I would see effective leadership in higher education as being about:

- Treating all staff with respect and trust
- Encouraging staff to make decisions and take the initiative
- Creating a clear sense of direction for the institution;
- Seeking in a positive and constructive way the views of staff in determining a strategic direction;
- Creating not only a clear sense of direction but also putting clear and unambiguous objectives in place to achieve the appropriate end;
- Making clear the values which underpin the work of the institution;
- Investing drive and energy in the strategic direction of the institution;
- Employing staff with a range of management and leadership experience and thereby benefiting from outside experience of different ways of doing things;
- Motivating staff to take responsibility for the performance in their respective areas of work;
- Encouraging a culture of continuous improvement;
- Responding to and dealing with poor performance and/or attitude;
- Engaging in critical self-evaluation and being prepared to build on strengths and to deal with the areas which need improving;

- Listening and paying attention to what people say about the institution in the interests of making improvement. This would include staff and students

I am aware of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and its work to draw on the best existing programmes and to commission new material to offer world-class development on leadership, governance and management to current and future leaders within higher education institutions. It is early days for this organisation but there have to be questions about the extent to which those who are in positions of leadership will take the necessary steps to undertake any such programmes. Such people need to be encouraged to attend. From my research there would appear to be a need for aspiring leaders in higher education to undertake some form of leadership development.

Of course, leaders in HEIs consist of more people than just vice-chancellors and they need to be involved in some kind of appropriate staff development processes to ensure that they too have the necessary leadership skills to enable them to carry out their significant role of strategic visioning and motivation of staff towards that end.

### **9.6.2 Quality**

What I have taken out of this research is a lack of a culture of quality improvement and enhancement in higher education institutions, which I see as a result of the need for them to focus on the regulatory and external processes of accountability. To facilitate such thinking I would be inclined to encourage cross functional teams who have a remit of looking at and considering issues and areas of concern where they feel that there is room for improvement and to provide such groups with both authority and resources to make changes. In this way staff involved would feel that their views are respected, there would be an opportunity for staff from different areas of the organisation to work together thereby appreciating more the work of one another and the whole process would facilitate a culture of change and of functions working together, something which is currently lacking in HEIs according to my research. Vroeijenstijn (1995) identifies some conditions for what he describes as European quality assessment. They are:

- Quality and quality assurance is in the first instance the responsibility of higher education institutions
- A system for quality assessment and programme review should not be imposed on higher education institutions from above but should be the initiative of the universities

- The role of governments and the European Union is to contribute by giving incentives and solving problems originating from national laws and regulations
- Validation and comparison of programmes can only be carried out by experts in the field. But employers and professional organisations must be invited to participate in the peer review
- The European dimension is essential and international programme review is a challenge, but there is a need to be cautious that international comparison does not lead to harmonisation and uniformity of programmes

So, HEIs would to undertake an audit of themselves to identify what their current ways of doing things are, to take a serious and objective look at what works well and so ensure that these approaches continue and also to identify where there is room for improvement and to put deliberate steps in place to manage such 'hindering' factors. Smout (2002) contends that a 'high quality university is one that fully plays its role in delivering on its promises in terms of the range of services, facilities and opportunities it offers to its students. This implies that every aspect of the institutions' operations is or should be involved in the pursuit of quality. This culture audit would surface, if done properly and seriously, what could be described as strengths and areas for improvement in a comprehensive way rather than the partial approaches taken currently (EFQM Excellence Model language). Stephenson (2004) describes an approach to quality that involved all members of the university community who are expected to strive for high quality in their activities, and where all areas are subject to self-evaluation and per review, including the vice-chancellor. This kind of preparedness to commit and take personal as well as organisational responsibility for quality is the kind of culture which is enshrined with the Excellence Model and one which does seems very much at home in a professional environment.

### **9.6.3 Staff views of students**

In the course of my research it was both depressing and reassuring to hear how HEIs viewed students. There were examples of students being quite badly treated with little respect and courtesy to an alternative perspective whereby there was an increasing view of students as customers. Whilst treating students as customers is not necessarily the same as treating them well, there is evidence from research of the need to create clarity about the nature of that relationship. I am aware that this is a controversial view in higher education but I think it is important to think in terms of whom the services provided by higher education are meant for. For me, this kind of thinking encourages a different mindset when thinking about students. It requires a more responsive approach to students in taking on board in a non-

defensive way feedback that is received through whatever means and to attempt to make appropriate changes in the interests of quality improvement. It means too that there is a need to move towards a position of thinking about a lecturer's role as one of a facilitator of learning rather than someone who imparts knowledge. In this way the focus is put clearly on the way in which a lecturer has a responsibility to ensure that students' learning is empowered. This does not remove from students their responsibility but puts squarely in the lecturing court their responsibility.

It was clear from my research that the 'new' universities had a more positive view of students and teaching than did the 'old' ones. This seemed to come from the dual role of staff in the 'old' universities of being both researcher and teacher. For me, the jury is out on the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research. I do believe that scholarship is important in keeping up-to-date with developments in one's field to ensure that students receive the most useful knowledge in the course of their education. However, the skills sets required for research and teacher roles are quite different and I do not believe that they necessarily go together. Also, because the role of researcher can get in the way of teacher, I would be inclined to have these roles separated out within higher education institutions without one having a greater status than the other as there is no doubt that at the moment the role of researcher has more credence in HEIs. I realise that this is a huge issue but it is an important one which came through a number of the HEIs visited and as such one that I believe is worthy of further investigation.

#### **9.6.4 EFQM Excellence Model**

I do believe that the Excellence Model could assist higher education institutions in the above work. However, my research suggests that it would require strong leadership or significant champions for it to have any chance of success and so I would not be recommending its use at this stage in the development of higher education institutions. This is not to say that it couldn't be used but it is to say that it would require some of the cultural aspects of HEIs described in the course of this thesis to have been moderated for it to be successful.

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## Winners & Finalists

Winning the UK Business Excellence Award is one of the highest accolades any organisation in the UK can achieve. To date the British Quality foundation has had more than 270 applicants, with over 75 organisations achieving finalist status and a total of 29 Award winners. These organisations represent valuable role models through which the British Quality Foundation can identify best practice and promote competitiveness in the UK.

### Past Winners and Finalists are:

#### 2004

##### Winners:

Siemens Automation & Drives

United Utilities, Facilities & Property Services Ltd

##### Finalists:

BMW Plant Hams Hall GmbH

Ricoh UK Products Ltd

Styles & Wood Ltd

#### 2003

##### Winners:

AMS Operations Hillend

Eaton Aerospace, Lakeside

TNT Post Group Information Systems

##### Finalists:

AMS Operations Division Broad Oak

Lombard NRGD

Ricoh UK Products Ltd

United Utilities, Facilities and Property Services Ltd

Vertex Customer Management

## **2002**

### **Winners:**

Siemens Communications

Runshaw College

### **Finalists:**

AMS Operations Division Broad Oak

AMS Operations, Hillend

Coors Brewers Ltd (Alton)

TPG Informations Systems

Vertex Customer Management

## **2001**

### **Winners:**

Northern Ireland Electricity

NSK Bearings, Peterlee

Rolls-Royce Airlines Operations

### **Finalists:**

Alenia Marconi Systems, Broad Oak

Inland Revenue Accounts Office, Shipley

Scottish Courage Brands

Siemens Communications Systems

**2000**

**Winners:**

Inland Revenue Accounts Office, Cumbernauld

St Mary's College

Springfarm Architectural Mouldings

Vista Optics

**Finalists:**

City Technology College, Kingshurst

Marriott Hotels

Northern Ireland Electricity

NSK Bearings

Turners Optometrists

Unipart DCM

**1999**

**Winners:**

British Aerospace, Military Aircraft & Aerostructures

Foxdenton School

NatWest Insurance Services

**Finalists:**

Barclays Direct Loan Services

NatWest Mortgage Services

Springfarm Architectural Mouldings

Vista Optics

## **1998**

### **Winners:**

Nortel Networks

BT Payphones

Seaview Hotel, Isle of Wight

### **Finalists:**

DHL Worldwide Express

NatWest Insurance Services

Post Office Counters Ltd

## **1997**

### **Winners:**

The Dell Primary School

BT Northern Ireland

Hewlett-Packard (UK)

BT National Business Communication

### **Finalists:**

Nortel Northern Ireland

NatWest Life Assurance



**1996**

**Winners:**

Mortgage Express

Ulster Carpet Mills

**Finalists:**

BT Northern Ireland

Griffin Factors

Lawson Mardon Plastics

NatWest Life Assurance

Nortel

**1995**

**Winners:**

ICL High Performance Technology

**Finalists:**

Benefits Agency, Springburn, Glasgow

Mortgage Express

Royal Mail

**1994**

**Winners:**

Rover

TNT Express

**Finalists:**

Avis

BT Northern Ireland

ICL Customer Services

**2004 European Quality Award Winners**

### **Category: Large Organisations and Business Units**

- Yell, United Kingdom - Award Winner and Prize Winner in Leadership and Constancy of Purpose and in People Development and Involvement
- Siemens AG Power Transmission and Distribution, Germany - Prize Winner in Results Orientation
- Knorr-Bremse Systems for Commercial Vehicle, Germany - Finalist
- Solvay Pharma, Spain - Finalist
- TNT Express - Finalist

### **Category: Operational Units**

- TNT Post Group Information Systems, United Kingdom - Prize Winner in People Development and Involvement
- T-Systems Development Centre South West GmbH, Germany - Prize Winner in Customer Focus and in People Development and Involvement
- T-Systems Multimedia Solutions GmbH, German - Finalist

### **Category: Public Sector**

- Kocaeli Chamber of Industry, Turkey - Award Winner and Prize Winner in People Development and Involvement
- Colegio Ursulinas - Vitoria, Spain - Prize Winner in Leadership and Constancy of Purpose
- Lauaxeta Ikastola Sociedad Cooperativa, Spain - Finalist

### **Category: Small and Medium-sized Organisations - Subsidiary SMEs**

- EMAR Satis Sonrasi Musteri Hizmetleri AS, Turkey - Prize Winner in Results Orientation
- SKF Türk Sanayi ve Ticaret Ltd.STI, Turkey - Prize Winner in Corporate Social Responsibility and in People Development and Involvement

### **Category: Small and Medium-sized Organisations - Independent SMEs**

- Fonderie del Montello SpA, Italy - Prize Winner in Leadership and Constancy of Purpose
- Hunziker and Co, Switzerland - Prize Winner in People Development and Involvement
- Schindlerhof Klaus Kobjoll GmbH, Germany - Prize Winner in People Development and Involvement

### **New in 2004:**

### **EFQM Local and Regional Government Prize**

#### **Level One:**

- Municipality of Dordrecht, The Netherlands - 2004 Winner

#### **Level Two:**

- Liverpool City Council, United Kingdom - 2004 Winner
- Bursa Nilüfer Municipality, Turkey - Special Prize for excellent progress in the development of e-services for citizens

# **RADAR SCORING MATRIX RESULTS**

## **Appendix 02**

Elements	Attributes Score	0%				25%					50%					75%					100%					
Results	<b>Trends:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>trends are positive and/or there is substantial good performance</li></ul>	No results or anecdotal information				Positive trends and/or satisfactory performance on some results					Positive trends and/or sustained good performance on most results over at least 3 years					Strongly positive trends and/or sustained excellent performance on most results over at least 3 years					Strongly positive trends and/or sustained excellent performance in all areas over at least 5 years					
	<b>Targets:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>targets are achieved</li><li>targets are appropriate</li></ul>	No results or anecdotal information				Favourable and appropriate in most areas					Favourable and appropriate in most areas					Favourable and appropriate in most areas					Excellent and appropriate in most areas					
	<b>Comparisons:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>comparisons with external organisations takes place and results compare well with industry averages or acknowledged 'best in class'</li></ul>	No results or anecdotal information				Comparisons in some areas					Favourable in some areas					Favourable in many areas					Excellent in most areas and 'best in class' in many areas					
	<b>Causes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>results are caused by approach</li></ul>	No results or anecdotal information				Some results					Many results					Most results					All results. Leading position will be maintained					
	TOTAL			0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100		

Elements	Attributes	Score	0%					25%					50%					75%					100%				
	Scope:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>results address relevant areas</li> </ul>	No results or anecdotal information					Some areas addressed					Many areas addressed					Most areas addressed					All areas addressed				
	TOTAL			0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100			

	Overall Total			0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100			
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#### ENABLERS

Elements	Attributes	Score	0%					25%					50%					75%					100%				
Approach	Sound:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approach has a clear rationale</li> <li>there are well defined and developed processes</li> <li>approach focuses on stakeholder needs</li> </ul>	No evidence or anecdotal					Some evidence					Evidence					Clear evidence					Comprehensive evidence				
	Integrated:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approach supports policy and strategy</li> <li>approach is linked to other approaches as appropriate</li> </ul>	No evidence or anecdotal					Some evidence					Evidence					Clear evidence					Comprehensive evidence				
	Total			0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100			

Elements	Attributes Score	0%					25%					50%					75%					100%				
Deployment	Implemented: *approach is implemented	No evidence or anecdotal					Implemented in about ¼ of relevant areas					Implemented in about ½ of relevant areas					Implemented in about ¾ of relevant areas					Implemented in all relevant areas				
	Systematic: *approach is deployed in a structured way	No evidence or anecdotal					Some evidence					Evidence					Clear evidence					Comprehensive evidence				
Total				0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100		

Elements	Attributes Score	0%					25%					50%					75%					100%				
Assessment & Review	Measurement: *regular measurement of the effectiveness of the approach and deployment is carried out	No evidence or anecdotal					Some evidence					Evidence					Clear evidence					Comprehensive evidence				
	Learning: * learning activities are used to identify and share best practice and improvement opportunities	No evidence or anecdotal					Some evidence					Evidence					Clear evidence					Comprehensive evidence				
	Improvement: * output from measurement and learning is analysed and used to identify, prioritise, plan and implement improvements	No evidence or anecdotal					Some evidence					Evidence					Clear evidence					Comprehensive evidence				
Total				0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100		
Overall Total				0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100		

**EFQM Excellence Model Criterion and Sub Criterion Descriptions**

The following descriptions have been taken from the EFQM Excellence Model handbook produced by the European Foundation for Quality Management:

**Criterion 1: Leadership**

How leaders develop and facilitate the achievement of the mission and vision, develop values required for long term success and implement these via appropriate actions and behaviours, and are personally involved in ensuring that the organisation's management system is developed and implemented.

**Sub criteria:**

- 1a. Leaders develop the mission, vision and values and are role models of a culture of Excellence
- 1b. Leaders are personally involved in ensuring the organisation's management system is developed, implemented and continuously improved
- 1c. Leaders are involved with customers, partners and representatives of society
- 1d. Leaders motivate, support and recognise the organisation's people

**Criterion 2: Policy and Strategy**

How the organisation implements its mission and vision via a clear stakeholder focused strategy, supported by relevant policies, plans, objectives, targets and processes.

**Sub criteria:**

- 2a. Policy and Strategy are based on the present and future needs and expectations of stakeholders

- 2b. Policy and Strategy are based on information from performance measurement, research, learning and creativity related activities
- 2c. Policy and Strategy are developed, reviewed and updated
- 2d. Policy and Strategy are deployed through a framework of key processes
- 2e. Policy and Strategy are communicated and implemented

### **Criterion 3: People**

How the organisation manages, develops and releases the knowledge and full potential of its people at an individual, team-based and organisation-wide level, and plans these activities in order to support its policy and strategy and the effective operation of its processes.

#### **Sub criteria:**

- 3a. People resources are planned, managed and improved
- 3b. People's knowledge and competencies are identified, developed and sustained.
- 3c. People are involved and empowered
- 3d. People and the organisation have a dialogue
- 3e. People are rewarded, recognised and cared for

### **Criterion 4: Partnerships and Resources**

How the organisation plans and manages its external partnerships and internal resources in order to support its policy and strategy and the effective operation of its processes.



**Sub criteria:**

- 4a. External partnerships are managed
- 4b. Finances are managed
- 4c. Buildings, equipment and materials are managed
- 4d. Technology is managed
- 4e. Information and knowledge are managed

**Criterion 5: Processes**

How the organisation designs, manages and improves its processes in order to support its policy and strategy and fully satisfy and generate increasing value for its customers and other stakeholders.

**Sub criteria:**

- 5a. Processes are systematically designed and managed
- 5b. Processes are improved, as needed, using innovation in order to fully satisfy and generate increasing value for customers and other stakeholders
- 5c. Products and Services are designed and developed based on customer needs and expectations
- 5d. Products and Services are produced, delivered and serviced
- 5e. Customer relationships are managed and enhanced

## **Criterion 6: Customer Results**

What the organisation is achieving in relation to its external customers.

### **Sub criteria:**

- 6a. Perception measures. These measures are of the customers' perceptions of the organisation (obtained, for example, from customer surveys, focus groups, vendor ratings, compliments and complaints
- 6b. Performance indicators. These measures are the internal ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the performance of the organisation and to predict perceptions of its external customers.

## **Criterion 7: People Results**

What the organisation is achieving in relation to its people.

### **Sub criteria:**

- 7a. Perception measures. These measures are of the people's perception of the organisation (obtained, for example, from surveys, focus groups, interviews, structured appraisals.
- 7b. Performance indicators. These measures are the internal ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the performance of the organisation's people and to predict their perceptions.

## **Criterion 8: Society Results**

What the organisation is achieving in relation to local, national and international society as appropriate.

**Sub criteria:**

- 8a. Perception measures. These measures are of the society's perception of the organisation (obtained, for example, from surveys, reports, public meetings, public representatives, governmental authorities).
- 8b. Performance indicators. These measures are the internal ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the performance of the organisation's people and to predict perceptions of society.

**Criterion 9: Key Performance Results**

What the organisation is achieving in relation to its planned performance.

**Sub criteria:**

- 9a. Key performance outcomes. These measures are key results planned by the organisation and which, depending on the purpose and objectives of the organisation, may include financial and non-financial outcomes.
- 9b. Key performance indicators. These measures are the operational ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the organisation's likely key performance outcomes.

## Appendix 04

### Interview Schedule used with Task Force Members in 'Clock' College

1. Prior to undertaking this exercise what was your knowledge of the EFQM Excellence Model?
2. Did you feel that doing the exercise was of value? (a) to you (b) to the College
3. Do you feel the approach taken was correct in terms of the following:
  - Training sessions
  - Teams as against individuals
  - Consensus groups
  - Using a consultant
  - Scoring the College
4. Do you feel that the College should proceed with implementing the EFQM Excellence Model?  
If yes, why?  
If no, why?
5. What did you like about participating in the exercise?
6. What did you dislike about participating in the exercise?
7. In your opinion, do you feel the staff of 'Clock' College might embrace the concept of the EFQM Excellence Model?
8. What might be the issues for staff in HE generally in implementing the Model in HE and specifically in 'Clock' College?
9. If you were asked to volunteer again for a similar exercise, would you?
10. Do you feel you have a better understanding of the EFQM Excellence Model now?

## Appendix 05

Sub-Criterion 1a. Leaders develop the mission, vision and values and are role models of a culture of excellence

### STRENGTHS

- The College Mission Statement is widely distributed
- There is some evidence of its use e.g. commercial activity and strategic plan
- Weekly meetings are held by most leaders
- There are strategic management development sessions
- There are examples of improvement activities e.g. management development days, self-assessment exercise

### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- There is no evidence of improvement activities being systematically managed
- There is little evidence that the College has identified leaders or leadership as described by the Model
- The effectiveness of communication strategies could be reviewed e.g. the distribution of minutes could be improved

### ACTION

- PaRC (senior management planning group) will make decisions on a systematic approach to institutional quality by the summer of 2002

### Scoring:

Approach	35	
Deployment	20	
Assessment and review	15	
Overall	25	

Sub-Criterion 1b. Leaders are personally involved in ensuring the organisation's management system is developed, implemented and continuously improved

#### **STRENGTHS**

- A variety of strategic and operational groups/committees meet regularly e/g PaRC, OPSG, Academic Council, teambuilding exercises
- There is evidence of leaders ensuring a process for the development, deployment and updating of policy and strategy

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- Anecdotal evidence is that the current structure does not support policy and strategy
- A system for managing processes have not been developed, nor had a corresponding framework of measurement
- There is no evidence of an improvement strategy

#### **ACTION**

- PaRC will review the College's structure for effectiveness by January 2002
- Staff development sessions will be run for all staff on effective communications by summer 2003
- PaRC will decide on responsibilities for process management by October 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>10</b>

Sub-Criterion 1c. Leaders are involved with customers, partners and representatives of society.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- There is evidence of leaders' involvement with a wide variety of partnerships
- There is evidence of College representation and vice versa on a variety of partnership boards/committees
- There are some clear examples of leaders' involvement in partnering and associated improvement activities e.g. Police, NHS

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of a systematic approach
- There is little evidence of this approach being reviewed for effectiveness

#### **ACTION**

- PaRC will undertake a review of our approach to customers etc, involvement by December 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>35</b>

Sub-Criterion 1d. Leaders motivate, support and recognise the organisation's people

#### **STRENGTHS**

- There is a staff development review processes for all staff
- Long service awards are made
- There was evidence of praise and acknowledgement of staff
- There was evidence of conference attendance and presentation
- The College has been re-recognised as an Investor in people
- The Principal holds staff meetings x 3 to communicate policy and strategy
- Senior management are involved in welcoming people to the College
- There is evidence of leaders motivating, supporting, recognising the organisations'; people e.g. coaching, mentoring
- HE2000 terms and conditions

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of a structure approach to recognising staff
- There is little evidence of a formal monitoring system

#### **ACTION**

- The HR Manager will develop policy and procedures for the recognition of staff by August 2002
- A formal performance monitoring system for all staff will e implemented by August 2003

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>40</b>



Sub-Criterion 2a. Policy and strategy are based on the present and future needs and expectations of stakeholders

### **STRENGTHS**

- Marketing department produces reports and commission studies into the future of Bell College, to define the market place and where we fit in. This is done in line with the colleges marketing strategy and with their strategic long-term plan. This is then disseminated to groups such as PARC and ADC, where future decisions can be made
- The college has a strategy for anticipating the needs of all our stakeholders by informing and discussing with them where the college is going in the future and what their views are.

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is evidence of understanding and anticipating developments in the market place, but no evidence is it fully acted on
- There is a need for market research service at school and course level.

### **ACTION**

- PaRC will review its approach to strategic planning to ensure that all available and necessary data is taken into account by October 2002
- The Marketing Department will issue guidelines on approaches to market research and responsibilities therefor by August 2002

### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>55</b>

Sub-Criterion 2b. Policy and strategy are based on information from performance measurement, research, learning and creativity related activities.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- Student performance and achievement ratio (SPAR)& student achievement ratio by unit of learning (SARU) gathered by registry and passed to course boards who in turn report to the Academic Standards Committee. The ASC report to the Academic Council who formulates policy and feedback to course leaders via the ASC
- Course board examines recruitment activities, admissions, entry qualifications, retention rates, progression rates and post course destinations
- Course boards have student representation. There are staff / student liaison committees which provide a forum for students to air their views
- PaRC committee looks at output from learning activities and from this determines strategy and policy

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no evidence of analysis the performance of competitors and best in class organisations
- There is no evidence of any analysis of social, environmental and legal issues
- There is a lack of clarity about which performance indicators are appropriate and how they are used

#### **ACTION**

- The Marketing Manager will undertake a competitor analysis by January each year
- A report for consideration in the strategic planning process will be prepared by the Marketing Department by January each year.

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>47</b>

Sub-Criterion 2c. Policy and strategy are developed, reviewed and updated.

### **STRENGTHS**

- Policy and strategy are developed and reviewed by PARC in conjunction with the heads of school and their planning groups.
- This is then disseminated to the rest of the college either by heads or by inclusion on college intranet.
- Staff are aware of the colleges strategic plans and know how to access them
- Policy and strategy is also developed based on previous knowledge, which is built on.
- College develops policy and strategy through 4-year business plan and 3-year financial plan.
- Organisation strategies are reviewed in august of each year.
- College works closely with its stakeholders primarily SHEFC, Employers and Students in developing the college and its future strategy.
- College develops key goals
- Not enough emphasis on evaluation
- Not as well developed at school level as at institutional level

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of the development of critical success factors
- No evidence of identifying present and future competitive advantage
- There is little evidence of an emphasis on evaluation
- There is little evidence of the way in which short and long term pressures and requirements are balanced
- There is no evidence of how the strategic development process is balanced given competing demands
- There is little evidence of agreement on USPs
- There is a lack of clarity on how the fundamental concept of excellence are reflected in policy and strategy

### **ACTION**

- PaRC will identify critical success factors for the range of college functions by Summer 2003
- PaRC will review its approach to strategic planning by December 2003

### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>43</b>

Sub-Criterion 2d. Policy and strategy are deployed through a framework of key processes

### **STRENGTHS**

- Well defined academic committee structure with academic council presiding over six committees
- Each committee has a clearly defined remit in the college quality procedures manual. This is published on the college intranet
- Minutes of committee meetings will be published in intranet and are currently lodged in the library
- Key processes are owned by committees and heads of school

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There are some grey areas within some committees as to who owns what i.e. PARC and ADC
- There is a lack of clarity about what the organisation's key processes are

### **ACTION**

- PaRC will set up a process management system to include a clear outline of the College's process owners by Summer 2003

### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>50</b>

## Sub-Criterion 2e. How policy and strategy are communicated and implemented

### STRENGTHS

- Regular team / individual meetings with line manager
- Aware of quality procedures manual on the intranet
- Communication provided from the top down to the bottom with opportunities to feed back up the line.
- Development plans go from PARC to heads to staff
- Formal communications exist with funding agencies, employer's etc.
- Detailed ICT strategy is posted on the Intranet
- Staff are aware of the College's strategic plans and know how to access them
- Policy and strategy is also developed based on previous knowledge which is built on
- The Principal meets with staff 3 times per year to communicate policy and strategy and progress towards strategic objectives
- The College's Strategic Plan is posted on the College Intranet
- There is no evidence of assessment and review
- Support staff could be made more aware if College strategy (via e-mail) directing them to the College Intranet

### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Not provided with anything in writing as regards policy and strategy from senior management
- Quality procedures manual should contain "nuts and bolts" of how academic staff should obtain and process information (e.g. how should results be recorded and who should they be passed to, where should reports be obtained)
- Currently unaware of any evaluation of the awareness of policy and strategy.
- No evidence of formal general communication
- There is no evidence that strategic objectives and targets are cascaded to operational levels
- There is a lack of awareness that the College Quality procedures Manual is on the College Intranet

### ACTION

- The Director of Quality will review the Quality procedures Manual to include procedural details for each process by Summer 2003
- The Assistant Principal (Academic) will produce a summary version of the College's Strategic Plan for all members of staff by September 2002

### Scoring:

Approach	40
Deployment	75
Assessment and review	0
Overall	38

Sub-Criterion 3a. People resources are planned, managed and improved

**STRENGTHS**

- The College Strategy for staff development cascades to department strategy
- There are annual reviews and reports
- There is an HE strategy:
  - Staff are involved in developing the strategy through the trades unions
  - Clear approach to recruitment and selection

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no system for performance review (apart from senior management)
- There is no policy for identifying the way in which we can make best use of people resources
- There are no staff satisfaction surveys

**ACTION**

- HR Manager will implement a staff satisfaction survey by December 2002

**Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>40</b>

Sub-Criterion 3b. People's knowledge and competencies are identified, developed and sustained

### **STRENGTHS**

- People's knowledge and competencies are considered through staff development reviews
- There is a staff development policy
- The College has been re-accredited as Investors in People
- There are team building sessions
- Staff development plans have been reviewed for effectiveness

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There was evidence that the staff development reviews were not conducted regularly
- It was unclear as to what drives the staff development policy
- There was little evidence of team and individual objectives being aligned to organisational targets
- There was no evidence of a system for performance review other than senior management

### **ACTION**

- The HR Manager will take responsibility for staff development review arrangements to ensure they fit in with other human resources plans. This will be done by December 2002

### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>35</b>

### Sub-Criterion 3c. People are involved and empowered

#### **STRENGTHS**

- There was anecdotal evidence that people feel involved and empowered
- There was evidence that opportunities provided in some instances following presentation of a good idea

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There was little evidence of a structured approach
- There was little evidence of a systematic way of involving people in improvement
- There was no evidence of a systematic means of empowering people

#### **ACTION**

- PaRC will identify an appropriate approach to involving individuals in improvement teams by December 2002
- PaRC will create a policy on empowerment by September 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>20</b>



Sub-Criterion 3d. People and the organisation have a dialogue

**STRENGTHS**

- There was evidence of effective communications e.g. meetings, email, Communications Group
- A communications survey had been undertaken
- The Operations Support Group is an example of two-way communication
- Staff meetings take place
- A PR person has just been appointed to facilitate communication

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There was little evidence of a co-ordinated structure of communications
- There was little evidence of a system to disseminate best practice
- There was little evidence of an effective communications policy
- There was little evidence of staff involvement e.g. surveys

**ACTION**

- The HR Manager will implement an annual survey of all staff satisfaction by December 2002
- The HR manager will develop policy and procedures for effective communication between the organisation and its people by December 2002

**Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>25</b>

Sub-Criterion 3e. People are rewarded, recognised and cared for

**STRENGTHS**

- 25-year long service award
- The College has a nursery which staff can use
- There is a flexible approach to time (nothing written)
- There is an occupational health policy
- There is a staff gym
- There is paternity leave policy
- Staff development money for further qualifications is available
- HE Terms and Conditions provide a facility for recognition

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no evidence of a systematic approach to rewarding people
- There was little evidence of the above strengths being communicated to the wider College
- There was anecdotal evidence of a lack of awareness of health, welfare and social provision
- There was little evidence whether the benefits above valued or the extent to which they are used.

**ACTION**

- The HR Manager will develop a rewards system for all staff by December 2002
- The HR Manager will promote the above benefits through Inform (house magazine) by September 2002

**Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>25</b>

#### Sub-Criterion 4a. External partnerships are managed

##### **STRENGTHS**

- There was evidence of good relationships with local enterprise companies
- Bell innovations involved with links to government departments in foreign countries
- There was evidence of policy and links with regards Socrates Erasmus partnerships. (11 different agreements current).
- We have a policy on exchange of staff and students, and this is happening and has happened in the past.
- School of Business has good links with external organisations and is developing partnerships with local organisations and business's with regards short courses and exchange of staff and ideas. This is detailed in the schools strategic plan.
- Preferred supplier list on catering
- Working with partners to improve processes e.g. SITS Implementation Group
- Currently looking at international student recruitment policy

##### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There was no evidence of international partnership policy and strategy. This is planned to be resurrected in the near future.
- Evidence of exchange of cultural compatibility and knowledge, not being pursued to the full extent.
- Other priorities tend to overtake continuance of cultural and knowledge exchange.
- There is no clear rationale for the identification of strategic partners, nor structure for the management of those partnerships
- Some evidence of assessment review e.g. Annual Monitoring Review
- There is no evidence of how the College manages public sector constraints

##### **ACTION**

- PaRC will identify a rational for strategic partnering by December 2002
- PaRC will identify its constraints as part of its strategic planning process by December 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>20</b>

#### Sub-Criterion 4b. Finances are managed

##### **STRENGTHS**

- College has financial strategy plan to support the colleges' strategic plan. It also has a well-defined strategy to assist in the recovery process of the college.
- 3 year financial plan (which has been submitted to Scottish Higher Education Funding Council) outlined in strategic plan, which is posted on college intranet.
- The financial strategy of the college cascades down to the support departments through the operational plan (also on intranet).
- Finance is geared towards facilitating the operational and development plans.
- Strong resolve to obtain degree awarding powers (in 3 years) and university status (within an additional 5 years) – Finance geared to support these primary objectives within the context of the financial recovery plan.
- Finance supports the plan to increase student numbers and targets have been set for the next four years.
- Tight reign maintained on cost implications (by director of finance) of any developments.
- Cash flow projections carried out before any major investment e.g. Caird Building, Halls of Residence, retaining Dumfries Campus. Sensitivity analysis carried out on an on-going basis to assess whether or not projections are meeting targets.
- Risk analysis maintained for fire, loss of contract etc. with associated recover plan
- There is some evidence of ad hoc assessment and review by the Governors
- A financial strategy has been designed via a systematic process that takes account of stakeholder needs

##### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no evidence of a systematic approach to income generation being fully deployed
- There is a lack of clarity about costing processes for commercial activities
- There is a lack of clarity about the relationship between central and devolved budgets

##### **ACTION**

- The Director of Finance will implement a systematic approach to income generation by September 2002
- The Director of Finance will arrange for staff training on central and devolved budgets
- The Director of Finance will seek feedback from those using the system and as such make improvements by September 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>45</b>

Sub-Criterion 4c. Buildings, equipment and materials are managed

**STRENGTHS**

- College has defined estates policy which is available to all staff
- All staff can comment on the estates policy and can make suggestions to the appropriate person on their views and ideas.
- College has well developed organisation e.g. building and works committee, health and safety committees
- College has well developed processes e.g. maintenance programme
- College has constructed/refurbished buildings in support of policy and strategy e.g. nursery, Caird building and residences.
- There is some evidence that estates policies have been reviewed for effectiveness
- There is an inventory management system at School level, also inventory management by the Finance Department for accounting purposes

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- Under- resourced
- Energy management such as waste disposal
- There is no evidence of a recycling policy
- There is little evidence of effective space utilisation
- Apart from the estates policy, there is little evidence of assessment and review

**ACTION**

- The Assistant Principal (External) will develop a recycling policy by December 2002
- The Assistant Principal (External) will implement an annual cycle of assessment and review by December 2002

**Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>50</b>

#### Sub-Criterion 4d. Technology is managed

##### **STRENGTHS**

- Schools have identified IT strategy for the school and how this could be implemented to assist both staff and students.
- I.T strategy document is available on paper.
- Try to keep up with emerging intranet and internet technologies – installed new server in last year, updated hardware network hubs to faster, more flexible hubs (switches) – increased bandwidth.
- I.T. inventory held on finance system, reviewed periodically.
- Existing technology heavily used – little or no redundancy
- Major exercise in progress to replace obsolete PC's with newer Pentium PC's bought from region (South Lanarkshire)
- The College has an ICT strategy and a teaching and learning strategy directed towards technology and learning
- The College has an Educational Development Officer who has responsibility for looking at new and emerging technology.

##### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- I.T. strategy document could be placed on intranet
- No specific period for reviewing inventory greater investment would allow greater new technology coverage and would create some scope for innovation
- Link between I.T. strategy (local to I.T. dept) and college ICT strategy (on intranet) seems hazy
- There is limited evidence of identifying the role of technology in the business of the College (e.g. learning environment)
- There is a lack of clarity about responsibility for this area of work in relation to how technology can support the learning environment

##### **ACTION**

- IT Manager will put the College's ICT strategy on the College's intranet by June 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>30</b>

#### Sub-Criterion 4e. Information and knowledge are managed

##### **STRENGTHS**

- College policy and strategy documents are posted on the intranet as are minutes of committee meetings
- Ad-hoc reports provided to meet management needs, private access is provided to admin servers to admin staff and global internet access is available to the majority of staff.
- Intranet access is only available within Bell college.
- Students have public internet access via open access areas. College website and education unit is available on public internet.
- Student data is checked by registry staff and double checked by I.T. staff validation is then on-going
- Admin and finance data is on a private network.
- Athens internet gateway allows staff access to several health information indices and several technical indices. May be accessed outwith college

##### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- No evidence of all groups publishing minutes
- No evidence of newsletter
- Do not appear to protect, cultivate or develop unique intellectual property in order to maximise customer value
- Need for heightened awareness of college resources available
- There is no evidence of an information and knowledge strategy

##### **ACTION**

- PaRC will put in place a system for Intranet management whereby staff are encouraged to use the Intranet as an important means of gathering and disseminating information. This will be done by December 2002
- PaRC will create an information and knowledge strategy by December 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>10</b>

Sub-Criterion 5a. Processes are systematically designed and managed

**STRENGTHS**

- There are examples of the organisation's processes being designed and managed e.g. registry through a new student record system, academic processes through a committee structure
- There is some evidence of systems' standards being applied e.g. environmental health, quality procedures manual.
- A number of the organisation's processes are well defined as a result of external accountability requirements e.g. finance
- Performance targets are set in some areas e.g. SPARs and SARUs.
- There is some evidence of assessment and review taking place e.g. review of the academic structure
- The College has a student charter with quantifiable targets

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no evidence of a process management system
- There is limited evidence of processes being designed and managed to support policy and strategy
- There is no measurement against the target

**ACTION**

- PaRC will implement a process management system by the summer of 2003

**Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>10</b>



Sub-Criterion 5b. Processes are improved as needed using innovation in order to fully satisfy and generate increasing value for customers and other stakeholders

#### **STRENGTHS**

- There is evidence of processes being identified for improvement e.g. Registry Forum
- Targets for improvement have been set by the Academic Standards Committee – SPARs and SARUs
- Changes to academic procedures and processes are communicated to staff the Quality Procedures Manual is amended
- There is evidence of a time line matrix approach being used to ensure that process objectives for improvement are monitored e.g. finance

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of targets for improvement other than those identified under 2 above.
- There is no structured approach to making improvements to processes

#### **ACTION**

- PaRC will put in place a structured approach to the improvement of all the College's processes

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>10</b>

Sub-Criterion 5c. Products and services are designed and developed based on customer needs and expectations

### **STRENGTHS**

- There is evidence of processes being designed and developed based on customer needs and expectations e.g. Registry
- The catering department uses customer questionnaires to gather feedback and uses that to make amendments and improvements to the products and services on offer.
- There are examples of generating products and services through partnerships and alliances.
- There is market research activity to identify customer needs and expectations is achieved through BELLVAL1
- There are examples of proactive involvement with customers to identify
- There has been a review of the BELLVAL1
- Student questionnaires are issued each year to elicit feedback. These are discussed at Course Boards

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of customer surveys and other forms of feedback other than 2 above.
- Apart from the BELLVAL1 Review, there is little evidence of assessment and review taking place.
- There is no formal feedback mechanism for gathering customer needs and expectations
- There is no universal approach to identifying customer needs and expectations

### **ACTION**

- PaRC will identify the College's customers by December 2002
- Having done the above PaRC will identify responsibility for customer surveys by February 2003

### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>25</b>

Sub-Criterion 5d. Products and services are produced, delivered and serviced

### **STRENGTHS**

- Students are provided with course handbooks and diaries that detail course provision.
- All courses and consultancy products are produced and delivered in line with the procedures and requirements laid down by the Academic Standards Committee
- Service statements have been produced by service departments to communicate that service to other parts of the College
- A range of marketing approaches is used to communicate products and services to the market.
- Quality procedures manual

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of these approaches being assessed and reviewed for improvement.
- Little evidence that brand management is assessed for effectiveness (eg strategy unclear, not proactively managed, components not fully implemented and resources, not a complete buy-in by staff.
- No evidence the brand is 'policed'

### **ACTION**

- Academic Development Committee will put in place an annual review of its approaches to academic development by December 2002
- The Marketing Department will put in place a brand strategy to ensure a corporate image and presentation by December 2002

### **Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>45</b>

Sub-Criterion 5e. Customer relationships are managed and enhanced

**STRENGTHS**

- There is an annual survey of students to determine customer satisfaction levels.
- There is some evidence that customer complaints are dealt with effectively e.g. Registry
- There is evidence of evaluation of short courses which are discussed between purchaser and provider with amendments made
- There are staff/student liaison meetings to consider quality improvements
- Guidance tutors provide an initial and ongoing point of contact with students
- There is some evidence of proactive involvement with customers

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of proactive involvement with customers.
- There is little evidence of data from student surveys being used in a structured way to enhance customer relationship satisfaction levels.

**ACTION**

- PaRC and/or Academic Council will develop a policy and practice to ensure that such student data is included in enhancing customer satisfaction levels by December 2002

**Scoring:**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Deployment</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Assessment and review</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>55</b>

Sub-Criterion 6a. Perception measures – these measures are of the customers' perceptions of the organisation

#### **STRENGTHS**

- A great deal of data is gathered e.g. Student satisfaction questionnaires, evaluation forms for conference facilities

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little or evidence of the use of data for decisions making on an on-going basis – limited trend data
- There is limited internal understanding of how data is collected for what purpose and how it is used
- There are no surveys given to corporate clients
- The status of funding bodies is unclear i.e. are they a customer or not?
- There are no targets
- No benchmarking is undertaken

#### **ACTION**

- PaRC and Academic Council need to use the data from student questionnaires to inform future planning and development

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Results</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>13</b>

Sub-Criterion 6b. Perception indicators – these measures are the internal ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the performance of the organisation and to predict perceptions of its external customers

### **STRENGTHS**

- A number of performance indicators are used e.g. Recruitment targets, social inclusion figures
- Comparisons with external Colleges because the performance criteria are set externally
- The College has a student charter which includes targets
- We collect data e.g. how much money has come in through contracts
- New and lost business is recorded

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- Few targets set
- Little trend data

### **ACTION**

- PaRC needs to decide on the measures for customer satisfaction and the means of achieving those:
  - o targets
  - o Measurements
  - o staff involvement
- PaRC needs to ensure that such data is used in determining future academic direction

### **Scoring:**

<b>Results</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>5</b>

Sub-Criterion 7a. Perception measures – these measures are of people's perceptions of the organisation

### **STRENGTHS**

- There has been a communications review (2 years ago) to identify current means of communication and to identify areas for improvement
- Investors in People interviews
- Staff/Student liaison committees engender student feedback on the organisation

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no evidence of a system for gathering results
- There is no evidence of how the results are communicated to people
- There is no evidence that the results are used to inform future planning and development

### **ACTION**

- HR Manager will implement staff satisfaction surveys by December 2002
- HR Manger will publish the result of its people surveys in Inform each year after the survey is completed
- PaRC will include these results in its improvement strategies each year

### **Scoring:**

<b>Results</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>0</b>

Sub-Criterion 7b. performance indicators – these measures are the internal ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the performance of the organisation's people and to predict their perceptions

#### **STRENGTHS**

- Recruitment and retention figures for students are available
- Comments scheme in the library
- Student satisfaction survey distributed annually and consider by Course Boards
- Feedback sheets used in the Catering Department

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no evidence of performance indicators available or used constructively
- Where there are PI's these are not communicated to the wider College
- There is limited analysis of questionnaires being carried out
- There are no trends

#### **ACTION**

- HR Manager will recommend to PaRC appropriate performance indicators by December 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Results</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>18</b>



Sub-Criterion 8a. Perception measures – Society's perception of the organisation

**STRENGTHS**

There are examples of the way in which the College interacts with society e.g.

- There are examples of the ways in which the College interacts with society e.g.:
  - School open events (languages, chemistry)
  - Staff involvement in Malawi project
  - Staff involvement in local fund raising
  - Press coverage of graduations
  - Staff members on local groups/organisations i.e. LEBP, SEL, South Lanarkshire council leisure group
  - Exchange events
  - Library open to the public
  - Recycle some toner and inkjet cartridges
  - Provide a skilled workforce by way of education which employs up to date technology
  - Use firewall to bar immoral behaviour on the internet
  - Health suite available to staff and students

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is little evidence of this being fully disseminated to all employees and the wider public
- There is little evidence of recycling activity
- There is little evidence of a College recycling policy
- There is limited evidence of the degree of student surveys, business surveys to ascertain stakeholder perception of college
- There are no measures

**ACTION**

- PaRC will decide on the important measures in this area by December 2002

**Scoring:**

<b>Results</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>0</b>

Sub-Criterion 8b. Performance indicators – these measures are the internal ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the performance of the organisation and to predict perceptions of society

#### **STRENGTHS**

- We get awards from local organisations, which are on display in reception area
- We review press cuttings involving the college
- The College has just appointed a PR person

#### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There is no evidence of measurement
- There is no target setting
- There is no trend data

#### **ACTION**

- The College's PR Officer will identify appropriate targets and performance indicators for this area by December 2002

#### **Scoring:**

<b>Results</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>0</b>

Sub-Criterion 9a. Key Performance Outcomes – these measures are key results planned by the organisation

### **STRENGTHS**

- There is a number of financial outcomes available and used including surplus, student numbers and meeting budgets
- There is a number of non-financial outcomes including success rates and retention.
- There are some positive and/or satisfactory trends
- There are some targets which are achieved
- The results address relevant areas

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- There are few targets
- There are few comparisons with external organisations

### **ACTION**

- PaRC will identify appropriate targets by December 2002
- PaRC will identify the points of comparison and how this information can be used internally by December 2002

### **Scoring:**

<b>Results</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>25</b>

Sub-Criterion 9b. Key performance indicators – these measures are the operational ones used by the organisation in order to monitor, understand, predict and improve the performance of the organisation

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- There are few process results</li><li>- There is a number of financial indicators e.g. cash flow</li></ul> <p><b>AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- There are no targets</li><li>- There are no trends</li><li>- There are no comparisons with external organisations</li></ul> <p><b>ACTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- PaRC will consider appropriate indicators by June 2003</li></ul>
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**Scoring:**

Results	0
Scope	0
Overall	0

Dear

I am currently undertaking PhD research under the supervision of Professor Lewis Elton at University College London. In this connection, I am looking at the applicability to higher education institutions of the European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model. In particular, I am considering whether there are aspects of university culture that help or hinder the applicability and implementation of the Model.

I have identified a number of institutions from different groupings of universities and colleges and have been analysing their public documents (prospectuses, websites, Annual Reports etc.) to assess aspects of their culture.

My purpose in writing is to ask if I could have access to a member (or members) of your staff with whom I could validate my findings gleaned so far from these written sources. I would envisage interviewing this person for about 2 hours using a semi-structured approach employing specific general questions with the opportunity to follow up on particular points made.

I can assure you that my research is confidential to myself and to my supervisor and that it is my intention to not publish the names of the institutions used.

I would be most grateful for your help in this matter and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Alaine K Sommerville (Ms)

- Q1. How would you describe the University?
- Q2. What are the things that are important around here i.e. what are the values and beliefs of the university? Are they shared i.e. it is largely taken for granted and is shared by some significant portion of members? If yes, is it socially learned and transmitted by members and provides them with rules for organisational behaviour?
- Q3. What patterns of behaviour are employed routinely that might be indicative of the culture?
- Q4. Who are the heroes and villains and why?
- Q5. What stories are told about the institution and the people in it?
- Q6. How are students perceived?
- Q7. What symbols does the university use that denote how it sees itself?
- Q8. What does the look (e.g. physical layout) of the university say about its culture?
- Q9. What impact does the history of the university have on its culture?
- Q10. What are the key rituals, rites and ceremonies?
- Q11. How has the organisational structure come about and what does it say about the organisation?
- Q12. Are there many or few controls and what are they?
- Q13. What language and jargon are used?

Q14. What routines can you describe that might be indicative of culture? What practices are employed routinely that might be indicative of culture?